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GRAHAM ASPEN, PAINTER

A NOVEL

BY

GEORGE HALSE

AUTHOR OF 'WEEPING FERRY,' ETC.

'The charities that soothe, and heal, and bless,
Lie scattered at the feet of men like flowers.'
WORDSWORTH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
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GRAHAM ASPEN, PAINTER.

CHAPTER I.

TAPIOCA TERRACE.

‘IT was a very unfortunate circumstance, very!’

This speech, sufficiently commonplace and apparently destitute of obscure intention, was made almost simultaneously by two persons in the innermost seclusion of their respective chambers, and the privacy with which the individual souls were thus unburdened proved that the sentiment expressed was not quite the one which would have been proclaimed from the house-top by either speaker, more especially as it was accompanied, in each case, by a pursing of the brow and a biting of the nether lip, significant of vexation.

The fact, however, that two or even twenty persons should make an identical remark regarding one and the same event is, after all, not very singular; but it certainly was strange that a third individual should, in the recesses of his home, break out in a monologue at about the same time in the exactly opposite sense, saying, 'It was indeed a lucky circumstance!'

Still, on reflection, it must be admitted that a diversity of opinion as to the same matter is in the natural order of things, and is only another proof that, in contemplating any object, the point of view makes all the difference. Man being by nature a contentious animal takes the side which happens to be antagonistic to yours, and will, for the mere sake of controversy, argue with all the vigour of a life-long conviction, whether conviction exists or not. And, indeed, without debate and disputation, existence here would lose half its zest; with absolute unanimity on all points, what a dull world this would be!

But, in the case before us, polemics had nothing whatever to do; in fact, it did not seem to admit of two opinions, consequently it was,

to say the least, strange that people could differ respecting the really providential escape of an elderly lady from being run over; and it was still more remarkable that the elderly lady should ascribe all her subsequent troubles to that event; and that everybody else should, in like manner, trace their misfortunes to the same catastrophe.

Surely if the adjective 'fortunate' could be fittingly and indisputably applied to any circumstance, it would be the timely rescue of a harmless old woman from beneath the wheels of one of Pickford's vans! How, then, could it be viewed as unfortunate? Perhaps the epithet was intended to apply to the accident? Well, unquestionably the accident was very unfortunate. Very. But the threatened disaster was so obviously and completely eclipsed by the fortunate deliverance which intervened that the dolorous ejaculation quoted at the beginning of this chapter seems a good deal out of place, even with this interpretation; and one is, on reflection, driven to the conclusion that the phrase could hardly have been intended for the accident, and still less for the escape. Unless, indeed, we

adopt the monstrous hypothesis that the moraliser regretted the escape, and that Pickford's van had not in this instance proved a fateful Jugger-naut to the venerable lady, to the immediate advantage of her heirs, administrators and assigns; but this assumption is too horrible to be entertained for a moment, more especially since one of the individuals taking the pessimist view of the event was the good lady's spiritual shepherdess, and the other her financial adviser.

Mrs. Sparragus had survived two husbands, and had piously laid their remains in the same grave; and, when the days of mourning in each instance were duly accomplished, she found solace in the fact that each partner had recognised her conjugal devotion, and had very properly rewarded it with a substantial provision. Mr. Flinders, her first spouse, was in the drug trade, and had, in a moment of happy inspiration, invented and patented a pill, the Flinders' Pill, of miraculous properties, which a grateful public took up—or rather took down—with such avidity that he speedily found himself in circumstances of enviable comfort; so much so that he was able to gratify the one wish of

Mrs. Flinders' heart, which was to have a dear little place in the country and to keep a cow. He thereupon purchased a small farm which happened to be in the market, and was within easy reach of his shop in Clapham. An amateur bailiff, Mr. Sparragus, was engaged and placed in charge of the property, which was henceforward known as Flinders' Farm, but which the neighbours said might, as a commercial speculation, have been more appropriately called Flinders' Folly; for, whether attributable to the inaptitude of the bailiff, or the impracticability of the soil, or the perversity of the elements, it proved altogether unremunerative, however pleasant and healthful as a resort from Saturday night to Monday morning; for Flinders found, when he came to balance his farm accounts, that his crops cost fifty per cent. more than they realised: that his strawberries averaged three and sixpence a dozen, his cherries a penny a-piece, and his eggs—when he got any, which was at rare intervals—tenpence three-farthings, allowing himself the usual trade discount. But there was, on the other hand, an unlimited supply of

groundsel and chickweed for the canary, and Mr. Flinders had the satisfaction of knowing that he could have supplied Covent Garden with any quantity of that particular crop, had there been a demand for it.

But Mr. Flinders, who had invented the pill for the public health, invented the farm for his own. If it had not paid as a speculation, it should be a success as a sanatorium for himself; it should recoup him his outlay in a handsome percentage of health. True, the drainage was abominable and the rooms stuffy, owing to its small windows—the house having been built at the period when light and air were measured with a foot-rule and taxed with a vengeance. But all that could be remedied,—the pill would pay for it; and Flinders, with characteristic energy, set to work and enlarged the windows, reconstructed the drains, and sanitated the place generally with the happiest results; and he and his wife might have continued to this day to pay their hebdomadal visit per omnibus, and proudly sit under their own cherry-tree, had he not been called upon to pay his debt to Nature,

having caught a fever whilst investigating a cesspool.

He lay desperately ill, and his case seemed to offer an excellent opportunity for the powers of the miraculous pill to be called into play; but the great inventor persistently refused his own panacea, the natural consequence being that he was a dead man in four-and-twenty hours, thus ceding his place by Mrs. Flinders' side much earlier than he need have done—supposing the testimonials appended to his advertisements were authentic, and the cures based on fact.

Mrs. Flinders was one of those dependent, clinging creatures who need the strong and robust support of man, otherwise they droop and fade away, and hard must be the heart that could view such helplessness without hastening to the rescue. Mr. Sparragus, the bailiff, was not the man to observe her grief unmoved, more especially as the farm was a nice little property and capable of expansion; he therefore lost no time in offering the solitary mourner the consolation of his manly sympathy.

Fate or Fortune, moreover, seemed to urge him onward, for, at this juncture, his revered sire, a grocer, died in the fulness of years and plenitude of prosperity, leaving him the business and a block of houses which he had built and named Tapioca Terrace, as a tribute of respect to his trade in general and to that nutritious article in particular. Mr. Sparragus thus found himself in a position of social equality with his well-to-do mistress, who, in her lonely walks in the pastoral environments of the farm, frequently chanced to encounter the well-to-do bailiff. It will, therefore, surprise no one but the most bigoted and uncompromising misogynist that the frail vine leant towards and clung to the robustious sympathiser more and more, day by day, and that in due course the Flinders' and Sparragus' fortunes were amalgamated and became one. But the happy union was all too brief. The new firm was fated to speedy dissolution. Mr. Sparragus, being now master of the pill, indulged in it to excess, the result being precisely the same as his predecessor's obstinate renunciation of it, for he departed hence prematurely, leaving Mrs.

Sparragus doubly bereft and in greater need than ever of a strong arm and virile heart to sustain her.

Tapioca Terrace consisted of three houses, with bay windows and a neat balcony running along the drawing-rooms, and Mrs. Sparragus was so fortunate as to find a tenant for one of them in a gentleman of great business capabilities, who paid his rent the day it was due, and, moreover, gave her the benefit of his experience and knowledge of commercial affairs. Mr. Stephen Honeydew was a city man, and that title at once secured the widow's respect and confidence, and he very soon proved his capacity by forming a little syndicate to rent the farm, and, enlarging on the original happy idea of the defunct Flinders, he started it as a sanatorium for the benefit of humanity at large; the accruing rent being at the same time laid out by him with such excellent judgment that it produced a most remunerative rate of interest. Mr. Honeydew resided at No. 3, Mrs. Sparragus occupied No. 2, while No. 1 was let to the relict of the Reverend Ebenezer Lipperty, formerly minister of the chapel hard by, and her step-

daughter, Lena, or to speak more strictly, Leonora Jane.

Mrs. Sparragus was thus very advantageously placed in respect of neighbours, who vied with each other in the little amenities which go to lighten the burden of sorrows that weigh on even well-to-do widows. Mr. Honeydew on the right giving her, as I have stated, the benefit of his masterly knowledge of finance, and Mrs. Lipperty on the left ministering to her in the manner becoming the relict of a Rev. Ebenezer.

Mrs. Sparragus had passed the meridian of life, and was, in fact, in the advanced evening; and as, in the natural world, the closing-in is often foreshadowed by gentle gradations of colour, serene tranquillity, and a universal preparedness for rest, so, in the worthy relict of Flinders and Sparragus in succession, were observable a simplicity and trustfulness which could not fail to awaken a sincere interest.

Competition in social matters has a tendency very similar to that in the commercial world—namely, it does not always tend to fraternity. No. 1 and No. 3 were so emulous of priority in

Mrs. Sparragus's good opinion that they grew to be suspicious of one another, and, like chess-players, studied each other's moves with a view to counteraction. If Mr. Honeydew handed the lonely widow a dish of scarlet-runners or a cucumber over the garden wall, Mrs. Lipperty immediately conveyed a pot of home-made jam or a tea-cake in at the front door. If Mr. Honeydew on the right raised his hat to his client while she was attending to her flower-beds, Mrs. Lipperty on the left kissed her hand to her and complimented her upon her good looks. So it came about that No. 1 and No. 3 viewed each other as poachers on the No. 2 preserve, and hated one another accordingly ; but, when the news got about that Mrs. Sparragus had narrowly escaped death through the intervention of a young man, who not only brought her home but was actually addressed as a friend and assured of her lasting gratitude, No. 1 and No. 3 for once took the same view, and, as stated in the commencement of this chapter, ejaculated to the effect that it was a very unfortunate circumstance, for who knows what the consequences may be !

The misadventure in question occurred thus : Mrs. Sparragus was in the habit of going to the Bank of England half-yearly to receive her dividends, and, on the occasion in question, the usual brougham was requisitioned and the good lady started on the expedition with becoming solemnity, her departure being witnessed with peculiar interest by her watchful and affectionate neighbours.

The flyman conducted her safely to the Bank, and, having deposited her at the entrance, moved away according to regulations, and awaited her some little distance off. Having duly received her money, Mrs. Sparragus emerged from the building, and, not discovering her cab, she stepped into the middle of the road anxiously searching for the vehicle right and left. At that instant a Pickford's van came galloping along in her direction, the horses beyond control. The shouts of the passers-by, the din of the traffic, the wild gestures of the horrified throngs as they realised her great peril, utterly paralysed the poor woman, who, giving herself up for lost, simply covered her face with her hands and helplessly awaited her fate.

The horses were close upon her, and in another moment she must have been dashed down and crushed, when a young man sprang forward and, seizing her by the shoulders, swung her with extraordinary dexterity clear of the wheels which grazed his own shoulder. A shout of applause greeted the young man as he supported the fainting lady to the pavement. The flyman, recognising his employer, drove up and she was assisted into the carriage. As the poor woman was excessively agitated, and, in fact, hardly conscious, the young man felt it incumbent on him to see her home, finding from the driver that she was unattended. He therefore took his seat by her side.

The ubiquitous newspaper reporter witnessed the accident, and in the journals there appeared the following paragraph next morning :—

NARROW ESCAPE—Yesterday at about twelve o'clock an elderly lady was crossing the road near the Bank of England when one of Pickford's vans, heavily laden, bore down upon her in spite of the strenuous efforts of the driver to restrain his young and spirited horses. To the horror of the by-standers the lady seemed unconscious of her peril, and had it not been

for the extraordinary presence of mind of a young man who was passing, and who literally snatched her from beneath the horses' heads, she must inevitably have been killed. A cab coming up, the lady and her rescuer drove away and their names did not transpire. It was noticed that the young man only just escaped the van himself, for his coat was torn from his shoulder by the wheels. After their departure, the police picked up a sketch-book which doubtless belonged to the lady or the gentleman. It was found to contain some admirable sketches in pencil and ink. As there was no name in it, the police are unable to restore it, and it remains in charge of the authorities at the Mansion House awaiting a claimant.

The fly arrived in due course at Tapioca Terrace, and, as Mrs. Sparragus was still much unnerved, the young man offered his arm, which was gratefully accepted, and No. 1 and No. 3, knowing as yet nothing of the circumstances narrated above, were more than surprised—they were scandalised on beholding so unwonted a spectacle as the widow leaning on the arm of a stranger.

Mr. Honeydew instantly saw in the attentive young man a rival financier, and Mrs. Lipperty, with equal alacrity, suspected him to be a wolf in sheep's clothing invading her fold and cor-

rupting the most cherished member of her flock. The consequence was they emerged simultaneously from their respective abodes with the intention of defeating the machinations of the strange bad man by their presence, where they were only in time, as the door of No. 2 closed behind Mrs. Sparragus and her visitor, to hear her say,

‘I can never, never repay you! I can never, never sufficiently show my gratitude!’

Whereupon Mrs. Lipperty and Mr. Honeydew, baffled and abashed, were under the necessity of retreating to their respective quarters outmanœuvred by the most innocent of tacticians, for Mrs. Sparragus had not the faintest idea that in closing the door behind her she had performed the masterly stroke of filling her virtuous censor at No. 1 with indignation, and sending away her confidential adviser at No. 3 confused and alarmed.

Mr. Honeydew’s reflections on the apparently trivial event were decidedly morbid. ‘Nothing could be more unsatisfactory to me just now,’ he meditated, ‘than for the old lady to enlarge her acquaintance. In fact, up to this time her

circle of acquaintance has been confined to myself,—the people at No. 1 are not worthy of her consideration ; her list of friends—reliable, trusted friends—has hitherto begun and ended with me. I was first, middle, and last. Consequently, it has been my happy privilege to manage her affairs with extraordinary advantage to her. But, when a simple soul like her gets hold of a new acquaintance, that new acquaintance invariably meddles and muddles and messes everything. That fellow had a keen and hungry look, and no doubt he scented coin, and, as she told him she could never repay him, it's a cool hundred to one that he'll repay himself, and all my care of her will be simply so much of my valuable time wasted. Certainly, nothing could be more unsatisfactory.'

Mrs. Lipperty was not, like her rival at No. 3, reduced to the narrow range of soliloquy, for her step-daughter Lena was present to receive the full force of her vexation and consequent flow of vituperation.

'Oh, the world, the world!' she screamed, as she entered the room where Lena was reading—'the wicked, wicked world!'

Lena was naturally much disturbed, and anxiously inquired what the wicked world had been doing.

‘That old thing next door, whom I have cared for as the apple of my eye, has gone astray!’

Lena was pained at the announcement, and offered to go in search of her and bring her home again.

‘Morally, Leonora Jane, morally.’ Mrs. Liperty always gave Lena her full complement of baptismal names when she rebuked her. ‘She has been and picked up some one and brought him home.’

Lena thought it a virtue rather than a vice to pick up anyone who needed such assistance.

‘Oh, the depravity of human nature! To bring home a young man!’

Lena still failed to see the enormity of the offence:

‘I suppose he’s a friend of hers.’

‘Don’t talk to me of friends, Leonora Jane. Why, she has no friend but myself! There’s that worldly man at No. 3—you won’t pretend

that he's to be mentioned in the same breath as me? I tell you, she hasn't a friend outside me.'

'An acquaintance.'

'People at her age oughtn't to make acquaintances, Leonora Jane, and I'm surprised that you do not condemn such goings-on.'

Lena with perfect simplicity said she thought it rather nice to make acquaintances, for she was conscious of her own poverty in that particular, any interchange of civilities outside the chapel walls being sternly interdicted.

'Then, Leonora Jane, all I can say is, you haven't profited much by all my teaching and example, and I'm truly thankful your poor dear father was removed before his daughter had such ideas. Oh, the awful times, when one's foes are they of one's own household!'

Lena was singularly natural and ingenuous, notwithstanding a course of discipline which ought to have made her subtle, suspicious, rancorous, and selfish. She was far from destitute of romance, though it had never as yet been in evidence. She possessed great intelligence and faculties which, however cramped

and tethered, could not be crushed altogether ; and, beyond all and above all, she was graced with that most beautiful of woman's attributes, a tender, true, and sympathetic heart.

Her step-mother's concluding observation, intended to crush her like a catapult, only provoked her curiosity :

‘Mamma dear——’

‘Don’t call me “mamma”—*I’m* only your step-mother, and I get reminded of it often enough, Leonora Jane !’

‘Mamma dear,’ repeated Lena, calmly and gently, ‘is it so wrong to make friends !’

‘Friends ! Bah ! I don’t believe in them.’

‘But you are a friend to Mrs. Sparragus ?’

‘That’s very true,’ promptly responded Mrs. Lipperty—‘very true.’

‘Then why should we doubt that she may have other friends equally sincere ?’

‘It isn’t altogether desirable,’ replied Mrs. Lipperty, testily.

‘Not desirable, mamma !—why not ?’

‘I suppose I must speak more plainly, Leonora Jane, as you are now old enough to understand these things. Mrs. Sparragus has con-

fessed to me more than once that I am her best, her only friend.'

'How sad !' meditated Lena aloud.

'Not so sad when you understand that it may make all the difference to us.'

Lena was at a loss to comprehend her step-mother's meaning; it appeared to her that it must make all the difference to Mrs. Sparragus.

'Mrs. Sparragus is a woman of some property,' continued Mrs. Lipperty, confidentially.

'I suppose she is.'

'And people who have no family or relatives usually bequeath their possessions to a valued friend.'

'I dare say that is so.'

'And, as I am that valued friend, Mrs. Sparragus has made a Will in my favour—a proof of her appreciation of the little good it has been my happy destiny to be to her in this world of falsehood and insincerity.'

Mrs. Lipperty awaited a burst of rapturous approval from Lena, who, however, received the information with great placidity, if not with cool indifference.

‘Therefore, Leonora Jane, you can perhaps understand that I can scarcely view with satisfaction the intervention of a new acquaintance next door.’

‘Why not, mamma?’

This inquiry, proving that the confidential communication she had made was entirely thrown away, so exasperated Mrs. Lipperty that, muttering ‘Stupid little fool!’ she dashed out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Lena’s perplexity was extreme. Why should so ordinary an event as a friendly visit next door provoke such vehement displeasure? Why such suspicion? Why such condemnation? Was the young man so palpably evil-disposed? Was the brand of vice stamped upon him? Surely it must be so, otherwise her mamma would never be moved to such righteous indignation. She would judge for herself, and catch a glimpse of the dreadful man as he quitted No. 2.

Lena had hardly taken a commanding position at her window when the door of No. 2 opened, and the vicious worldling, the arch-intruder, courteously raising his hat as he turned

away, strode quietly and with unconscious dignity down the gravel-path into the road, and, without turning his eyes to the right or to the left, walked along Tapioca Terrace, and vanished from the view of all the eyes which followed his movements.

‘That fellow knows what he’s about,’ muttered Mr. Honeydew, savagely. ‘Ten to one, —nay, a hundred pounds to a shilling, he’ll circumvent that old woman next door. I think I’ll follow him, and find out who he is.’

Whereupon, Mr. Honeydew slipped out at the side-door, and took the road which the young man had taken.

‘He’s a sneak, if ever there was one,’ said good Mrs. Lipperty between her teeth. ‘He hasn’t been long in finding out that old thing’s weak point. I dare say he has gone away with her instructions for a fresh Will in his pocket. Drat him!’

‘Oh, dear! oh, dear!’ exclaimed Mrs. Sparagus, hurrying to the window, ‘I wish he’d come back a moment. I can’t let him go like that! It seems so ungrateful of me!’ and the good woman beckoned with all her energy to

the departing stranger, who, however, strode away wholly unconscious of the mental distress and wild gestures of the staid and respectable lady he had just quitted.

‘I can’t imagine,’ thought Lena, ‘why mamma grudges Mrs. Sparragus her new acquaintance. He appears so nice—a perfect gentleman. For my part, I—I wish mamma had such a friend.’ And Lena was very thoughtful the rest of the day. She felt the first faint stir of romance in her young bosom, and the new sensation almost alarmed her—but it was very, very sweet.

CHAPTER II.

GRAHAM ASPEN.

MRS. SPARRAGUS, still agitated, led the way to her sitting-room, the young man following with some hesitation, and as he reached the door he paused and said,

‘Now, madam, that I have had the pleasure of seeing you home, I will, with your permission, take my leave.’

‘Oh! no, pray don’t go yet, sir. Rest a moment,’ pleaded the lady, almost pathetically; and, indicating a chair, she motioned to him to be seated, and the young man complied with courtesy and deliberation.

He was a youth of three-and-twenty, of well-proportioned but spare frame, fine features, and a countenance ‘sicklied o’er’ with suffering as

well as the 'pale cast of thought.' His attire, moreover, bespoke the hard lines within which his lot was placed, but he bore himself with an easy dignity which was natural to him, and bespoke a sterling character that poverty could not affect.

'Oh, dear me!' exclaimed Mrs. Sparragus, fanning herself with her handkerchief and wiping her moistened eyes, 'what a wonderful escape I have had!'

" 'I think, madam, you were in some little danger; but these escapes are constantly occurring in the city, and are thought nothing of.'

'Ah! but *I* think a very great deal of it, sir, and shall never, never forget that, if it hadn't been for you, and you alone, I——'

'Anyone else would have done exactly the same; I happened to be nearest to you, that was all,' interrupted the young man.

'Nay, sir, nobody else advanced a step to help me.'

'It so happened that I was crossing the road at the same moment.'

'But your wonderful courage and strength, too!'

The young man smiled. As regards 'courage,' he felt it would have been cowardice to have acted otherwise, and, as to 'strength,' he still trembled and felt faint with the physical effort involved in the performance.

'I assure you, madam, it was the commonest act possible, which anyone else would have done—and done less roughly.'

'Nothing could have been gentler!' remonstrated Mrs. Sparragus, bursting into tears. 'Oh, I—I can never thank you enough!' and the good soul buried her face in her muff.

'I need no thanks—I deserve none for doing what I was bound to do, believe me;' and the young man rose to leave.

'If you will not remain longer—and I have no right to ask you—I hope you will at any rate let me know the name of my preserver, sir!' and Mrs. Sparragus looked almost imploringly at the young man, who, after a moment's hesitation, drew his card-case from his breast-pocket.

'That I may take an opportunity of making you some return,' she continued, with significance.

The young man replaced the card-case in his

pocket as a flush of offended pride swept across his pale features.

‘If you will permit me, madam, I would rather remain—unknown,’ he replied.

‘Oh, why?’

‘Because the pleasure—sincere pleasure—I felt in having rendered a trifling service would be wholly destroyed if there was the smallest possibility of any “return” being made.’

Mrs. Sparragus could hardly understand such disinterestedness, for she had never met with any objections on the part of anyone to accept substantial recognition for services rendered, and she rubbed her eyes in astonishment as the young man rose and offered his hand, saying,

‘It has afforded me more pleasure than I can express to have done anything deserving such grateful feelings, and now I must bid you farewell.’

Mrs. Sparragus took the extended hand.

‘But your card, please!’ she urged.

‘Oh, no!’ replied the young man, laughing, ‘it really isn’t worth while!’ and, waving a respectful adieu to the disappointed widow, he left the room.

Only when the street-door closed did Mrs. Sparragus feel the full extent of her vexation, and she rushed to the window to catch a last glimpse of her unknown preserver, who rapidly traversed the gravel-path wholly unconscious of the scrutiny with which he was being observed by numbers one, two, and three.

As he strode homeward he reviewed the whole event of the morning, and shuddered as he contemplated the imminent danger in which the good lady had been.

‘By Jove!’ he muttered, drawing a deep breath, ‘I was afraid to tell the good lady the full extent of the danger for fear of horrifying her, but another instant, and the poor soul must have been crushed to death! I thank God that I was there! my life, after all, has not been wholly useless!’ and he went his way with a contentedness which was a new sensation to him.

Suddenly he paused, and, plunging his hands anxiously into either pocket, exclaimed, with extreme vexation,

‘Gone! my sketch-book gone! I have dropped it somewhere. How careless of me! for I’m sure I had it with me when I left home;

and unfortunately my sketches of the "Queen of the Glen" and "The Sisters" were in it—ideas for pictures, and I doubt whether I can possibly remember the lovely effect of light and shade as I saw the trees in the forest. Oh, it is worse than vexatious—it is a grievous loss! But such is my luck. Time and toil wasted, and my little bit of strength cast to the winds! Had I remained at home this misfortune would not have occurred to me—but, stay, had I remained at home a dire calamity had happened to that poor lady. How trivial my mischance is, after all, compared with that which might have befallen another! If that is the price to pay for the privilege of saving a human life, who would grudge it?' and the young man pursued his way with a relaxed step but a more resigned spirit.

Graham Aspen (such was his name) was an art-student, having finished his novitiate in the schools with honour, and lived in Thistle Grove, Brompton, where his modest possessions were contained in a single room, which consequently served as atelier and bed-chamber, the latter portion of it being concealed by a curtain drawn

across it, and which formed an appropriate background for his easel, on which rested a canvas covered with a silk scarf. Models, studies, draperies, books, and the materials and paraphernalia of his craft lay about in 'most admired disorder,' and were evidence that the occupier gave scant attention to personal comfort and appearances as usually understood; but a keen observer would have accounted for the neglect as his glance rested on sundry bottles of medicines standing on the mantelpiece.

Not until he reached his chamber did he realise the extent to which he had taxed his strength in the adventure of the morning, and not till then was the extent of his morning's loss made evident, when with a repetition of the exclamation, 'Lost!' he threw himself into a chair and yielded to the depression which had of late become habitual with him.

'Stay!' he ejaculated, rising after a long interval of rest from his seat and taking a draught of cordial, 'I see the whole effect in my mind's eye! yes, just as it was. Oh, if I could but fix it!' and taking up a new canvas he dashed in with a masterly pencil the scene which had in-

spired the lost sketch of the 'Queen of the Glen.' 'Ah!' he cried as he laid down his palette, 'it is not lost!' and wiping his moistened forehead he sank back exhausted with the effort.

In Graham Aspen were united genius and bodily frailty, as is too often the case, the vital force failing to keep pace with the winged imagination. The creative faculty in the young artist made havoc with the mechanism with which it was allied, and it was no unusual thing for the revulsion of energy to occur after its abnormal exercise. It was so on the present occasion. For the remainder of the day he scarcely moved hand or foot, but surrendered himself to enforced repose and reverie. Once he rose and removed the handkerchief which concealed the picture on the easel, and a face of singular beauty and sweet expression was revealed. Graham sat before it, and his eyes were rivetted to it. It was purely an ideal study. He had never seen the original of such a head, but like another Pygmalion he seemed entranced by the creation of his own hands. It might be an abstract passion, a passion of the rapt soul, a passion causing no heart-throb and no delirium, if

such be possible in a young man of twenty-three summers ; but assuredly the creation of his own hand had a fascination for him which was almost idolatry. And the potent spell which had evoked this singular work and guided his pencil was no beautiful reality met in the flesh, no siren of social life, no artless, sweet girl-graduate who had crossed his path, but simply a voice, a human voice, and nothing more.

Graham Aspen, subject to moods of melancholy and fits of depression, which left him unable to study, was wont, when under these visitations, to seek distraction in sylvan haunts, or by the broad ocean, where Nature usually won him back to patient endurance. In one of these dolorous attacks, he hurried away to the New Forest, and there courted tranquillity and a return of energy. But on that occasion he sought alleviation in vain. The beauty of the scene, the balmy air, the perfect harmony surrounding him had no power to solace. In vain he wandered hither and thither ; in vain he sought forgetfulness in exploring the beauty so profusely spread before him. The spirit of revolt and discontent mocked him, and held him

in thrall. The effort was useless, and he returned to his hotel; and there again the foul fiend taunted him. Why cling to vain and irksome existence? Why struggle against increasing failure of body and mind? Why endure these ever-recurring attacks, when eternal repose is so easy of acquisition? Why cling to a life of unrest, a life of joyless labour with a stricken body, when a mere prick in the arm would ensure forgetfulness and peace? There was fascination in the hateful suggestion; witchery in the mad thought. Yes, yes, better snatch the rest Nature denies. Why live? Why suffer, without kindred to love or friends to sympathise? Existence such as this has neither joy, nor hope, nor purpose. Let it end! A burdened, useless life had better cease to be! The dire resolution was made with the phlegm characteristic of Graham in his saner mood. He was calm in that moment of mental distraction. One farewell look at Nature, and then—and then—— Through the open window there was borne a clear, sweet voice, singing, with surpassing melody, the simple air of ‘Auld Robin Gray.’

Aspen started; he awoke; he threw off the terrible incubus that had unmanned him, for that song recalled his mother. She used to sing it, and the voice was as hers!—soft, pure, cultured. He peered through the window, but nobody was visible. He listened entranced, for the song still rippled on the breeze. It proceeded from an adjoining room, and was followed by admiring comments on the lovely sunset, and long after it had ceased the young man hung over the sill, lost in a reverie of precious memories. All the night through, Graham heard, in imagination, the tones which, coming, as it seemed to his active mind, from one who had passed away, were little less than angelic. Nor had he the least vulgar curiosity as to the singer. He took no measures on the morrow, as most men would have done, to satisfy himself as to the possessor of the voice. Had he inquired, he would have learnt that a lady and her daughter were sojourning there with a view to sketch, and Aspen might, with the assistance of the landlord, have obtained a casual interview with the mother, or a glimpse of the maiden. Easily might he have compassed a

rencontre with one or both in the walks and woods; easily might he have submitted his sketches to them with the freedom and good-fellowship which are common between brothers and sisters of the brush; but no! he had surrendered himself to a happy illusion, which had dispelled a noxious delirium. At a moment of dire temptation a voice had intervened, and thus was conjured up before his imagination a vision of perfect womanhood. He saw his dead mother, and he was content. The breathing reality might equal, or even surpass the fair face of his conception—but it might destroy the charm! He dared not risk disenchantment.

Unfavourable weather setting in, the company at the inn dispersed, and, within a few days, Aspen too had turned his back regretfully upon the spot which, notwithstanding that terrible half-hour of aberration, was invested with a strange charm, for the voice was with him still.

Nor, on reaching home, could he rest until, putting a new canvas on his easel, he touched in reverently and tenderly the features of the

ideal as conjured up in a moment of keen sensibility by the strains he had heard.

Unconsciously he traced the features of his mother spiritualised, for it was her face that the well-remembered song called up from the far-off past. Beauty of form and colour were there, but they were the beauty and the colour of one who had passed the portals of the grave and had been translated to the higher life. With all the fervour of religious feeling, with the unwearied enthusiasm of a zealot, Graham devoted day and night to the perfecting of his conception. And so jealous of it did he become as the work proceeded that no eye but his own was allowed to rest on it, and it was kept veiled, as we have seen.

Twilight had closed in, and as Aspen gazed upon the face, which he had grown almost to adore, it grew more and more indistinct, when suddenly he was startled by the appearance of a female form with identical features standing in front of the picture with her eyes fixed upon his. The last faint rays of light barely sufficed to adumbrate the dainty outline which, without a rustle or a footfall, drew nearer and nearer.

Graham, his heart in a tumult, his eyes flashing with amazement and terror, waited for the voice which he was so sure belonged to the form that he would, without a moment's hesitation, have staked his existence upon it, but it was denied him ; and, in his growing impatience, he tried to challenge his visitor, but he was speechless. Stirred to a state of excitement bordering on frenzy, the young artist attempted to stretch forth his hand and grasp the arm of the fair creature who stood within his reach ; but the effort was in vain—he was powerless. And so intense had in a few moments grown his agitation that its prolongation must end in very madness. With a wild cry he sprang from his seat, and, as he burst through the spell, the mirage vanished, the phantom of his overwrought brain faded into the painted head on the easel, and he found himself alone.

The agitation of a few moments' duration was followed by a reaction of many hours' prostration, and then supervened a long attack of the cough which had become almost chronic ; but rest and patient resignation soon brought relief and strength and interest in his studies.

And, in resuming his pencil, he could for the moment forget the oppressive secret of which he could not divest himself. Graham Aspen was too sagacious, too brave, too honest to ignore the fact which was so patent whenever he beheld his features in the glass; and when, with all his philosophy and composure, he realised the sad truth, he was ready to confess to himself that ambition, which was folly in other men, was madness in him, the pursuit of common pleasures worse than vanity, and love almost a crime. For him length of days was an unmeaning phrase,—no vista of life's road to be traversed could he present to his mind's eye as he glanced at his hollow cheeks and wrestled with the cough which convulsed him. Why toil for more than the daily bread? The world's honour and its praise were for the robust and the hopeful; but he, from the serene vantage-ground of one who was already far on the journey hence, could view it all with indifference, if not with contempt. If he laboured, as indeed he did at times with extraordinary assiduity, it was to

satisfy a sense of duty—he was bound to exercise the faculties with which he was endowed; and if, in that employment, he had conjured up on his canvas a beautiful creation, and had gazed upon it till he grew to love it, it was in response to the yearnings of nature, it was to gratify a passion which had been purged and etherealised.

His landscape grew apace, for his interest in his work increased as his conception took concrete form, and in a few days the ‘Queen of the Glen,’ a graceful and fairy-like silver birch, received the last touch. But the customary penalty of unwonted exertion had to be paid, and Graham had again to lament the burden of the flesh. Was it needful—was it his duty to still combat his infirmities? he would ask himself. Yes, he replied. He was bound by every law of nature to employ every known means to eke out his store of strength and prolong his days. With this righteous and wholesome conviction came the resolution to seek advice, to consult a physician, and here a difficulty started up—his insufficient means. But the impediment

was recognised only to be thrust aside. His poetic mind and busy hand had created the wherewithal. There stood the 'Queen of the Glen,' and its sale would furnish the necessary funds.

Without hesitation or compunction he carried the work, which he had intended to grace his studio withal, to the well-known dealers, Glare and Gooley, to whom he modestly and anxiously submitted it.

'Landscape!' meditated Mr. Glare aloud, shrugging his shoulders, 'a drug in the market. When *will* you artists take a hint from the French and paint figures? Undines, for instance, and Phrynes, Andromedas, Auroras, and such like? The market's never glutted with them; they sell, sir, in any quantity. As for this sort of thing, trees—birch, isn't it?—why, we may have it on our hands for'—the dealer began to scrutinise the painting more closely—'for months.' He put on his glasses and examined it afresh. 'Humph! it's not by any means bad; but these landscapes are so—' and he took the picture into a stronger light. 'I've seen trees worse painted, I must confess. Look here,

Gooley,' calling to his colleague. 'This young man wants to dispose of this.'

'Landscape! No use. Can't buy any more. No demand,' announced Gooley, scarcely glancing at the work. However, he did glance at it over his partner's shoulder a second and even a third time, whispering in his ear.

'It's natural, young man,' he said, turning to Graham, who stood bashful and dejected; 'I may even call it pretty. The treatment is new, the style original; but, unfortunately, our class of customers prefer something more'—and the connoisseur studied the painting keenly—'something more—you know——'

'Yes,' quietly and meekly responded Graham, 'thank you. I'm sorry I have troubled you;' and he advanced to relieve them of the picture.

'It is *just* possible we might be able to do with it,' said Glare, indifferently, without offering to relinquish the work, though Aspen's hand was already upon it. 'What are you willing to take for it?'

'I thought of asking fifteen or twenty pounds,' returned the artist, with hesitation.

Glare and Gooley stepped aside, and, still examining the picture, conferred together.

‘How much did you say?’ demanded Glare, sharply, almost severely, which had its effect on Aspen.

‘Ten.’

‘Well, I suppose we must take it,’ replied the dealer, placing it on an easel; ‘but I must ask you to sign it; we make that a condition always.’

‘If that is the case, I will, of course, do so, and will take it away for the purpose,’ answered Graham.

‘Oh! you need not have that trouble; we keep tubes of colours in case of need,’ promptly responded Glare, at the same moment producing the pigments. ‘You can make yourself at home, sir, and mix any tint in keeping with the foreground. In the meantime I will draw the cheque.’

Graham signed the picture as desired, and, receiving payment, rose to take leave.

‘If you have anything more to dispose of, we should be glad to see it,’ said Glare, patronisingly.

‘I have nothing.’

‘Perhaps you will paint us something?’ put in Gooley, rattling the coin in his pocket.

‘I don’t paint Andromedas and Phrynes,’ quietly replied Graham, without any intention in the way of retort.

‘We do not ask you for figure subjects,’ promptly responded Gooley.

‘No,’ followed Glare, ‘we think you are more in your element with this style of art,’ pointing to the work they had just purchased; ‘we should be glad if you would paint us a pendant to it.’

‘Thank you.’

‘And, as we are always glad to encourage rising talent, we should not refuse say, fifteen pounds—if up to the mark.’

‘Thank you!’ and Graham rose, and, saluting his patrons with cold respect, took his leave, casting a last regretful glance at the ‘Queen of the Glen.’

‘All gone now!’ he muttered to himself, as he turned homeward with measured step. ‘The sketch lost and the painting gone.’

As soon as he was clear of the shop, Messieurs

Glare and Gooley bent over the picture in eager contemplation.

‘I don’t know when I’ve seen a tree touched in with such grace and tenderness,’ said Glare, adjusting his glasses.

‘And true to nature!’ continued Gooley, with enthusiasm, ‘why, it’s a gem!’

‘Graham Aspen,’ read Glare, as he deciphered the signature: ‘the name’s new to me.’

‘And to me.’

‘But, if he goes on painting like this, it’ll soon be in everybody’s mouth. What shall we price it at?’

‘Fifty guineas.’

‘Yes!’ and Glare put their private mark upon it accordingly.

‘Pity you didn’t get his address,’ observed Glare, reproachfully: ‘I should have liked to have kept him to ourselves.’

‘A thousand pities, but really I was so taken with the picture that I never thought—but wait—who’s the frame-maker?’ and he turned the picture round and read ‘P. Toddy, Carver and Gilder, Fulham Road;’ and beneath it was inscribed, ‘G. Aspen, Esq., 9, Thistle Grove.’

‘ Well that *is* a bit of luck !’ ejaculated Glare and Gooley simultaneously ; ‘ we’ll drop in upon him one of these days. It won’t do to let him slip through our fingers. But he evidently requires to be managed—we mustn’t be in a hurry, for these artists are sometimes so confoundedly touchy, and, although this young fellow appears weakly and half-starved, he’s not wanting in pride.’

And Messieurs Glare and Gooley, after placing their new acquisition in every situation in their gallery experimentally, assigned to it the most select position in their cabinet of choice works.

CHAPTER III.

THE CONSULTATION.

GRAHAM ASPEN was now in a position to give effect to a long-standing resolve to learn from an expert the actual state of his disorder, and to obtain from him, if possible, some forecast of his fate. With that sad and solemn intention he went, a few days after his transaction with Glare and Gooley, to Saville Row, and knocked at the door of the famous specialist, Dr. Eustace.

Shown into the dining-room, he there found several ladies and gentlemen awaiting their turn to be summoned to the physician's presence, some conferring together in whispers, some staring at the pictures on the walls, some turning over the periodicals spread on the table, and some, silent and moody, looking vacantly

into space. To an artist, the materials for a picture furnished in a physician's waiting-room are deeply impressive. The spectacle cannot but be mournful, for it tells of suffering and mortality, and presents sometimes fortitude, sometimes resignation, but more often stolid resistance to the inevitable. Its ominous walls are, however, not unfrequently illumined by unselfish devotion which is hardly less than heroic, and a cheerful patience which seems scarcely of earth. Opposite to Graham sat a father fondling a slight, fair, pale child on his knee, using every device to appear cheerful, while now and again he surreptitiously brushed away the tears which welled in his eyes. Presently they were invited into the consulting-room, and, as they passed Graham, he heard a suppressed groan as the father whispered to the child,

‘Now, my precious one, we’re going to see what pretty things the kind gentleman has got to show us ;’ and the frail child clapped her hands for joy.

The next to be called was a man of middle age, but who had already outlived the fair

illusions of life, and only sought the physician's aid to lighten its heavy burdens. Contrasted with him was a young man still enamoured of the pleasures which had sapped his once vigorous powers, and who hoped to deceive the lynx-eyed expert as to the origin of his malady, even as he deceived himself.

At the far end of the room in comparative obscurity was a group, composed, evidently, of an invalid mother and her daughter. The mother was a delicate lady, and the daughter a fine handsome girl, abounding in health and strength, and though Graham could not distinguish their features, and made no attempt to overhear their conversation, he could not fail to observe that the daughter was lavishing the utmost care and tenderness on the parent. Watching the varying expressions of her countenance, her anxiety exaggerated the symptoms, and conjured up all manner of evil forebodings, and she would now moisten her temples with eau-de-Cologne, and now hold a vinaigrette to her nostrils, smoothing her hair, kissing her, and cheering her with the sweet words of parental endearment, which in her early childhood her mother

doubtless addressed to her, thus reversing their respective positions in a manner which was at once touching and mirth-provoking.

‘Darling pet! Poor little invalid! I think it looks better. Its eyes are so bright, and there’s a wee bit of colour on its dear cheeks! You do feel stronger, my precious one, do you not?’

‘Yes, dear child, I’m stronger to-day.’

‘And do you know what I’m going to do?’ enquired the daughter, gazing passionately into her mother’s eyes, and kissing them.

‘I can’t imagine.’

‘I’m going to take it out of town, if Dr. Eustace will let me; and as he thinks so highly of Flinders’ Farm, for its air, water and drainage, I intend to take it there, and bring the colour again to its cheeks, and strength to its limbs. There!’

‘That will be kind of you,’ replied the lady, with assumed submission, humouring her daughter’s loving conceit.

Whether it was that Graham was of a sympathetic nature, or that his physical strength, which had never wholly recovered from the

exploit in Cheapside, suddenly failed him, or that the room in which the patients assembled had become oppressive, or that he had walked too far or too rapidly—whatever the cause, the young lady had scarcely ceased speaking when there was a singing in his ears, a cold sweat burst out from head to foot, the room spun round, his heart failed him, and he fell back in a swoon upon the sofa.

It was the work of an instant for the young girl to rush to his assistance, support his head, dash eau-de-Cologne in his face, and ring the bell. Servants were instantly in attendance, Dr. Eustace appeared, and the young artist, still unconscious, was carried to an adjoining room and laid on a couch.

The untoward incident greatly agitated the invalid lady, and her daughter was hardly less distressed, but Dr. Eustace was able in the course of a few minutes to reassure them, stating that the attack was not at all serious, and arose, in fact, from his having fasted too long; but the patient was already recovered, and desired him to express his deep concern for having caused the ladies a moment's disturbance.

‘But, Dr. Eustace,’ urged the young lady with sadness, ‘he looked so exceedingly ill.’

‘Yes, my dear Miss Tierney, he is undoubtedly in a bad state;’ and he tapped his own chest with his finger.

The young lady seemed much distressed.

‘Can nothing be done for him?’ she enquired, earnestly.

‘We shall see. We shall see.’

‘You’ll let us know, won’t you?’ asked the invalid mother, turning to the physician, ‘for we both feel so sincerely for him.’

‘Oh, yes, please let us know,’ echoed the young lady, pitifully.

‘I will, madam.’

By the time the ladies’ interview with Dr. Eustace had ceased, Graham, who had been kindly furnished with refreshment, had rallied, and was shown into the consulting-room, where Dr. Eustace received him with great kindness.

‘Pray be seated, sir,’ he said, encouragingly; ‘and, before we go into your case, let me urge you never to take these long walks on an empty stomach. Few men are strong enough to do it. Your little attack was not induced by any

organic derangement, but purely for want of food.'

This authoritative statement was comforting to the young man, who had viewed it as symptomatic of his malady. The physician placed him in a chair with his face in a strong light, scanning his features with a penetrating eye and peculiar interest.

'You have a cough, I dare say, though I have not heard it.'

'Yes, I have always had a cough.'

'Everybody coughs more or less in this climate,' replied the expert, carelessly. 'May I ask your name?'

'Graham,' replied the young man; and the physician made entries in his journal under the heading 'Mr. Graham.'

You look about twenty-three.'

'That is my age.'

'Have you been weighed lately?'

'I was weighed six months ago.'

'What did you scale then?'

'Ten stone twelve.'

'Would you mind sitting on this machine of mine? Thank you;' and Graham sat on the

scale accordingly. The dial behind him indicated barely ten stone.

‘That will do;’ and the patient resumed his former seat without having noticed the indication shown by the machine.

‘I think I must ask you to strip, Mr. Graham,’ said the physician, still busily making notes.

Graham stripped to the waist, and the physician applied all the tests with stethoscope to chest and back, rapping and manipulating with infinite patience and care, ascertaining his temperature and pulse, and ultimately desiring him to resume his clothing, which, he did not fail to observe, was scanty and worn. He also noted the scar on his shoulder where he had been grazed by the wheel of the van.

‘Do you know, Mr. Graham, that I am dreadfully inquisitive, for I like to learn all about my patients; so you will excuse my inquiring your profession or vocation?’

‘I am an artist.’

‘Well, I thought so,’ replied the doctor, cheerily; ‘and that circumstance interests me, for I must tell you I dabble in art a little, and my

friends say it ought to have been my profession instead of my recreation.'

Graham expressed his gratification at the information, and, glancing round the room, he noticed some fine etchings of landscapes, and ventured to inquire whether they were his performances.

'Yes; I never travel without some plates in the carriage, with the ground ready prepared, and if I am detained anywhere, as occasionally happens, I stroll about, and, if I discover a bit I like, I just etch it then and there, and when I get home I bite it in.'

Aspen expressed his admiration.

'Of course, the things are vile to your cultured eye, Mr. Graham,' continued the expert, still 'taking stock' of the young man, and entering every fact as it came under observation in his journal; 'but I never like to be idle, and I dare say you are equally industrious?'

It was a point-blank question, put with a purpose evidently.

'Ah,' replied Graham, abashed, 'I must confess that I waste time sadly.'

'You sit and ruminate, perhaps?'

‘Sometimes for days, sir.’

‘Well,’ replied Dr. Eustace, jotting down his notes, ‘some people lie fallow, as it were, then work furiously.’

‘I do so.’

‘Enthusiastically—almost passionately?’

‘Yes.’

‘And you become prostrated by the intense mental and bodily effort?’

‘That is the case.’

‘This is precisely what I surmised when you entered the room.’

Graham was struck with astonishment and admiration at the physician’s penetration.

‘Now tell me, Mr. Graham, about your—parents;’ he hesitated at the last word, as one does who is touching a sore wound.

Graham made no reply, though he endeavoured to do so. A spasm shot through his heart and flushed his cheek.

‘I see, I see,’ said the expert, soothingly; ‘my own dear father and mother died young! Our wonderful organs are so soon thrown out of gear. You probably have—brothers and sisters?’

Graham again paused.

‘Ah, it does so happen, too often! Half the population succumb before they reach maturity:’ and he recorded the facts elicited by the patient’s silence.

‘I had a brother and a sister,’ answered Graham, sorrowfully, ‘but they, like my father, died, I believe, of—consumption. But I never knew the particulars, as they died while I was at college in Germany.’

‘Consumption, the scourge of these islands!’ reflected Dr. Eustace aloud, making a final entry and closing the journal.

He then drew his chair close to the artist and took his hand.

‘My young friend,’ he said, with the utmost gentleness, ‘you come to me with great misgivings as to your state, and, if I am not deceived, you wish to hear what I have to say, be it good news or bad?’

‘I do so, most distinctly.’

‘Your own view of your condition is, I think, an unfavourable one?’

‘I confess it is not very hopeful.’

‘And, bearing in mind the decease of your

brother and sister, you imagine the taint to be hereditary ?’

‘Such has been my conviction ?’

‘Conviction, exactly ; and let me tell you that, so intimately and wonderfully do the mind and body act and re-act, a rooted conviction will often call into existence and renewed vitality a disease which had, otherwise, exhausted itself and died out.’

Graham had no rejoinder to offer either in support or in contradiction of this statement.

‘Consequently, as you have admitted, you brood over it, you surrender yourself to a summary and unwarranted conclusion. This, my friend, emasculates the mental faculties, so to speak, and the body pays for it. Hence the inability at times to pursue the art you love. Hence the prostration, the consequent lowering of the power of resistance, and the possibly fatal issue !’

The physician enunciated his views with decision and gravity, which startled Graham, but they were so evidently dictated by a kindly and sympathetic feeling that the young artist was deeply touched.

Continued the expert :

‘You are apt, Mr. Graham, to neglect yourself and think wholly of your art. That is wrong—grievously wrong ; the body needs cultivation as much as the mind. You close your eyes to human fellowship. That is sinful—positively. You renounce the recreations and simple pleasures pursued by other men. That is the height of folly.’

Graham inclined his head in admission of the charges.

‘You see, I am taking most unusual interest in your case. Some day I will tell you the reason ;’ and the physician seemed to be lost in an abstraction for a few moments. He then continued : ‘All I will permit myself to impart is that which you desire to hear—the actual condition of your vital organs.’

‘Yes,’ eagerly responded the young man, ‘yes, it is that, and only that.’

‘I may be in error, my friend—I hope I am. We doctors, you know, are only mortals, and as fallible as other men. But, if I am not mistaken, there are complications in your case. There

are indications of incipient tubercles in the left lung. The right is at present sound, but may be affected any day if you take cold—and then—and then—no human aid can save you unless we can get up your strength. But understand, dear sir, I'm hopeful, for you have youth, and youth will often falsify our unfavourable conclusions and reverse the conditions upon which they were based. Moreover, you are wise enough, I think, to avoid excesses and excitements, and this is as good for you as any prescription I can give.'

Graham weighed every word which fell from the physician, and, though his utterance seemed to flatter hope, he divined his thoughts while he heard his speech, and Graham felt sure that on the whole his opinion was unfavourable.

'If I may ask you to speak without reservation,' said the young artist, after an uneasy interval of silence, during which the physician looked at his clock which was an involuntary intimation to his patient that he had nothing more to say, 'I would beg you to tell me how

long you think a person in my state might be expected to live?’

The question was put so calmly, so directly, and with such manifest faith in the physician’s candour that Dr. Eustace was taken aback, and he gazed on the young man’s placid face with surprise and admiration.

‘I will be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Graham, for, with a man of your temperament, anything in the shape of a quibble would be unjustifiable. If you survive three years, there is no reason why you should not live ten, thirty, or fifty years. At the present moment you are at low-water mark. You have lost materially in weight within the last six months, consequently your recuperative powers are less than they should be. But I say again, you have the invaluable, inestimable fund of youth, and Nature is generous to youth, as a rule. Moreover,’ continued the kindly gentleman, rising and laying a friendly hand on Graham’s shoulder, ‘your profession favours us. Follow it without blind enthusiasm. Live much in the open air. Take plenty of exercise and plain food. Cease to be a recluse. Get cheerful companionship. Don’t

watch the phases of your disease ; forget it, and, above all,—be hopeful. The last word I have to say is the best. Hope !’ and the good doctor held out his hand to take leave of his patient.

Graham rose, and, gratefully thanking him, modestly laid the fee on the table.

‘My dear friend,’ said Dr. Eustace, intercepting him in the act, ‘it is a rule with me never to accept a fee from a brother artist—if I may be allowed to arrogate so much ! therefore, pray gratify me by not making me break my rule !’

Graham recognised the physician’s delicacy and generosity.

‘But if you will permit me,’ continued the physician, ‘I should so like to visit your studio ! Would you mind favouring me with your address ?’

‘I have only a single room,’ said Graham, without hesitation, ‘and really I have nothing to show you.’

Dr. Eustace rightly understood this as an objection on the part of the young man to receive a visit, and with the utmost delicacy he forebore to repeat the enquiry.

‘Let me see you again in a month,’ he said.

‘Yes, I will come again in a month.’

The young artist thereupon took his leave and retraced his steps to Thistle Grove with a sense of relief. He had challenged the oracle and it had not answered enigmatically.

‘Three years,’ he muttered, ‘he gives me three years! That’s more than I expected. Why, ’tis a life-time! Anything may be accomplished in three years!’

Dr. Eustace re-opened his journal, and, having completed his diagnosis of Graham’s complaint, he at once fulfilled his promise to the lady who had preceded Aspen in his consulting-room, and wrote as follows :

‘The young gentleman who fainted here this morning, and in whom you evinced so kind an interest, is, I regret to say, in a condition which gives cause for some anxiety. There is a suspicion of phthisis in the family history which he gives me, and there are complications. The disease is hereditary, which is a bad feature. His mind, moreover, is somewhat morbid on

the subject. There is a tendency to melancholia, but I cannot say that he may not throw it off, though I do not find much ground for believing that he will. Therefore my opinion is, on the whole, decidedly unfavourable, though I admit the case is obscure. I only hope I may be wrong, for he is a young man of no common order of mind, in whom I feel a keen interest. He is an artist, and that again evokes my sympathies;’ &c., &c.

Graham Aspen regained his modest home, and, as was his habit, he cast a jealous and hurried glance in the direction of his easel which supported the pictured head. The silken scarf was over it as usual, but he did not notice that it had been disturbed.

As he pondered on the interview of the morning, the extreme kindness of the physician’s manner recurred again and again, and he felt that he had made but a shabby return in withholding his full name. A morbid shyness and lack of self-confidence caused him to lead the life of a recluse, as Dr. Eustace had discovered; and it seemed like ingrati-

tude after that good man's frank and friendly treatment of him to misinform him on so trivial a point.

‘The consequence of my stupidity is, that I can never call upon him again, however much I may need his valuable advice.’

Such was the result of Graham's meditations.

‘Strange,’ meditated Dr. Eustace, as he rested in the evening by the fireside vainly endeavouring to fix his attention on his book; ‘’tis strange how that young man, Graham, recalled my poor Mildred! the same voice, the same cast of features, the same slight frame. Ah,’ he continued, sighing, ‘I wonder what the poor girl's fate is! Since she ran away from school with that vagabond Sinclair, and married him, she has been lost to us. Lost as effectually as though the grave itself had closed over her on that fatal day. ’Tis strange, indeed, how instantly and vividly the mind brings back the almost forgotten past at the sound of a voice, at the sight of a face! Poor Mildred, so fair, so good, so frail in health, I think I see you now!’ and Dr.

Eustace gave himself up to reverie into which the personality of Graham forced itself again and again.

The kindly physician felt, moreover, a dissatisfaction with himself which was purely professional. Contrary to his habit of reticence, he had, in an unguarded moment, been betrayed into forecasting the young man's fate, basing his opinion on the family history he had drawn from him, and the familiar law of heredity in these diseases. He felt it was ill-advised in him thus to commit himself, especially with a patient of the peculiar temperament of this interesting young man; and Dr. Eustace was more than vexed, he was pained.

CHAPTER IV.

LENA.

GRAHAM ASPEN had barely got clear of Tapioca Terrace, when Mrs. Lipperty, eager to make herself acquainted with the equivocal circumstances occurring next door, donned her most monastic attire, and, with a book in her hand and a homily on her lips, sallied forth, and gave a lugubrious knock at No. 2.

If Susan did not immediately respond to the summons, it was not in consequence of any defect in her auditory faculties, for the knock was only too well heard and too well known, and the damsel was, in fact, intercepted by her mistress as she was on her way to the door. Susan had judiciously solved the perplexing problem of her mistress's return, in a state of

agitation, with a stranger, by listening at the keyhole, and she was therefore not surprised when Mrs. Sparragus, calling her, said, in an undertone, 'Susan, I can't see her,' at the same time retreating to her bed-room.

Susan put up the chain, and, opening the door a few inches, said, in reply to Mrs. Lipperty,

'Missus ain't very well; she's been dreadfully upset.'

'Ah! by that man?'

'No, mem, by one of them Pickford's vans as nearly runned over her.'

'Nearly ran over her!'

'Yes, mem, and it was all along o' that young man.'

'That she was nearly run over?'

'No, no, that she escaped.' And Susan recited the adventure in the most graphic manner, adding touches of her own to make it dramatic. 'He's the 'andsomest and nicest young gent as ever I see!'

'But who is he?' demanded Mrs. Lipperty, sharply, disgusted to find the intruder had already an ally in Susan.

‘That’s just the thing as puts my poor missus out so.’

‘How is that?’

‘Why, she’d give anything to find out who he is, and he refused to tell her.’

‘I can’t imagine why she should be so anxious to know,’ urged Mrs. Lipperty, inquiringly.

‘Can’t you? I can.’

‘Tell me the reason, Susan. You are such an intelligent girl.’

‘Wouldn’t you or anyone else want to reward a ’andsome young man for saving you from one of them Pickford’s vans?’

‘Does she wish to reward him?’

‘Course she do. Ain’t it nateral she should?’

Mrs. Lipperty saw it all at a glance. The foolish old woman desired to prove her gratitude in the only manner a person of her age, possessing a nice little property and money in the Funds, could. She evidently meant to make him her heir.

‘This must never be!’ meditated the relict of the Rev. Ebenezer; ‘I must warn her against committing this atrocious folly. She shall not

be the victim of this person's cupidity, if I can prevent it !'

Turning to Susan, she continued,

'My good girl, it is necessary that I see your poor mistress to administer comfort in this distressing matter.'

'That's exactly what she don't want,' promptly responded Susan, closing the door another inch as if apprehensive that the spare figure in black might squeeze through the narrow aperture.

'You don't understand me, my good girl.'

'But it seem my missus do, for she said jest now, "Susan, if that Mrs. Lipperty comes here a-bothering and a-preaching, tell her I'm laying down and ain't to be disturbed, for I'm that upset I can't stand her goings-on, which is bad enough when I'm well, goodness knows, which I ain't."'

'Did the poor dear say all this?' sighed Mrs. Lipperty, with upcast eyes, at the same time biting a piece out of the finger of her black glove. 'Really ?'

'Lor', yes, and ever so much more. She says, says she, "That there woman at No. 1 is a

perfec' nuisance with her long face and her solemn talk—I can't a-bear it, and I've half a mind to go right away to Flinders' for the sake of peace." Them's her very words, and I tell you plump and plain, mem, because I know you likes to hear the truth.'

'Yes, Susan, I love the truth,' piously responded Mrs. Lipperty, clasping her hands and gnawing her tongue at the same time. 'Give my dearest love to your mistress. I wouldn't on any account disturb her. Good afternoon ;' and the amiable ministrant, apprehending further confidences from the too veracious Susan, turned from the door, which was punctually and effectually closed.

Denied the satisfaction of delivering her bosom of its stored-up invective on the head of Mrs. Sparragus or the bad young man with mercenary designs, Mrs. Lipperty was reduced to the alternative of directing it towards an offender nearer home, whose shortcomings and general perversity exhausted her vocabulary of censure, compendious though the volume was, —that offender was Lena.

When the spiritual legatee and relict of the

Rev. Ebenezer entered her step-daughter's room, she found her by the open window, apparently absorbed in thought, a closed book lying by her side.

‘Leonora Jane!’

‘Yes, mamma,’ replied Lena, roused from her reverie and starting at the abrupt intrusion; ‘I am here.’

‘So I perceive; and may I ask what you are occupied with?’

‘I am doing nothing.’

‘Doing nothing! Then let me recommend you not to do it, but, on the contrary, to use the faculties which the Almighty has given you, and do something,’ retorted Mrs. Lipperty, with scathing severity. ‘Remember, Leonora Jane, “doing nothing” is an invitation to Satan; it is opening the door to the enemy, who enters in and very soon makes you busy enough!’

‘Nothing would delight me more, mamma, than to have employment.’

‘Hem! This is the first time I have heard you say as much. And you haven’t given any particular evidence of a passion for work.’

‘I have not had the opportunity, mamma,’ calmly responded Lena.

‘Not had the opportunity! Where there’s the will there is always the opportunity! It hasn’t occurred to you that Maria would be glad of a little assistance on washing-days in hanging-out and ironing? And I don’t remember your ever offering to make a pudding or peel the potatoes.’

‘I didn’t know, mamma, that you wished me to do those things.’

‘I wish you to be of use in the world, and not to eat the bread of idleness.’

‘That is exactly what I desire to be, mamma, if you will allow me to do that for which I feel fitted.’

‘Girls of your age, Leonora Jane, can’t possibly know what they are fitted for. They usually allow their elders to direct them.’

‘I should only be too thankful to be directed,’ replied Lena, sorrowfully, ‘if I had a friend to do so;’ and she burst into tears.

‘Well, that’s about as insulting and ungrateful a remark as you could have made! Friend, indeed! and, pray, who has been your

friend all these years? Who has clothed and fed you, and shown you how full to overflowing you are of evil, and how depraved the natural man within you is? Who has never wearied in this thankless task? Answer me, Leonora Jane! who?’

‘Yes, mamma; you have done all this.’

‘Then it seems that you have yet to learn that they are our truest friends who tell us our faults. Oh, fie, fie! Never let me again hear you talk such hollow cant about desiring to be directed how to employ yourself. To think that such pharisaical stuff should be spoken by a child of my beloved Ebenezer! The best thing you can do, Leonora Jane, is to scourge your own refractory nature and try to tread in my footsteps and dispense a little happiness amongst those with whom it has pleased the Almighty to place you!’ and, with this parthian shot, the excellent and beneficent lady retreated to her own chamber.

What was the effect of this tirade upon Lena? Just what might have been foreseen with a pure-minded and intelligent girl. Until lately the four walls of their abode had

contained all she cared for or dreamt of. Her home was her world. Habit had centred everything there, and a natural contentedness and obedience to authority had rendered her to all appearances characterless. But her step-mother's ever-ready strictures and railing accusations had rent the veil that shut everything from her mental view, and had gradually let in light until she saw how truly barren the place was. Hitherto a rigid monasticism had excluded from her all but matters personal and domestic; a spurious moral regimen had so restricted her horizon that up to this time real human interests and fellowships found no place in it, and she might have lapsed and wasted down into the degenerate and emasculate creature of which the ascetic is made. But her step-mother's excessive and coarse austerity saved her, for it called into activity a vital power which had been hitherto dormant. She awoke to the consciousness that her existence was mechanical, little more than animal: that the area of her mental functions was a narrow circle of prejudice which admitted neither light nor warmth, and that the

better part of her was numb and useless, like a paralysed right arm, and denied its natural exercise.

The knowledge once gained was bound to increase and to broaden out into the vast field of human concerns. Lena, after much mental conflict, awoke and felt she must be free or else die. The spirit that asserted itself unbidden was not that of revolt, but of firm, calm protest. Dutiful by nature, discipline had made her dependent; but, in an hour of trial, Will declared itself, and Lena the child became transformed into the woman animated with the power to comprehend the actualities of life, and to take her share in its work. She seemed to chafe like a caged bird pleading to spread its unused pinions and beating against the iron bars. And, as this sense burst into conviction with electric suddenness, the careless gaiety of her young heart mellowed down into a settled gravity, for she felt that she had responsibilities. And, beyond this, she foresaw the uncompromising animosity of her step-mother in the new departure to which she must now be committed, and the issues seemed portentous. But the sense of

independence of action proper to adolescence seemed to gain strength the more she contemplated her position, and, though she tossed on her bed in unrest the whole night through, the hours were employed in that fit mental debate from which sound results are evolved.

When she descended to the breakfast-table in the morning her resolution was formed. She met her step-mother with her wonted dutiful greeting.

‘Lena,’ said Mrs. Lipperty, who also had passed an unquiet night, reviewing the events of the day, her dissatisfaction being equally divided between Mrs. Sparragus and her step-daughter; ‘Lena, I wish you to pay a visit at No. 2 to-day, and see if the old lady is disposed to be at all communicative about that affair of yesterday. I wish particularly to know; and, as she refused to receive me yesterday, which surprised me greatly, seeing that my only object in calling was to offer her comfort and consolation, I prefer that you go and gather all you can.’

‘I hope you will spare me an errand which is not to my taste, mamma,’ quietly responded

Lena; 'I have great respect for Mrs. Sparragus, and, when I call to see her, I do so without any motive.'

'I thought as much! This is you who so desire to be directed! The very first thing I wish you to do you decline.'

'I ask you not to send me on an errand which does not seem to me quite creditable.'

'Now you are taking upon yourself to censure me!'

'I think, mamma, you will grant that it is time I had opinions of my own.'

'Certainly not, if they are contrary to mine, as, of course, in a giddy, simple girl they must be.'

'Then I'm afraid I must claim the right to think for myself,' answered Lena, in a tone of firmness which startled her step-mother.

'Matters are come to a pretty state! This looks very much like open revolt!' ejaculated Mrs. Lipperty, gazing fiercely at the rebel across the table. But the rebel remained calm and unabashed.

'I speak as I do, mamma, because I see the time has come for me to do so, and I am sure

you would wish me to be frank and plain in a matter which is serious—at least, to me.’

Mrs. Lipperty had no rejoinder sufficiently crushing ready. She could only make a gesture of impatience and contempt.

Lena drew a deep breath, and continued :

‘I should have thought you would have remembered that young people are not always children, but grow up, and have, soon or late, to take their places in a world of action and labour, and, the longer they close their eyes to the duty of fitting themselves for their future, the more unready will they be when that future comes upon them !’

‘Hem ! All this is out of a book, I suppose !’ interrupted Mrs. Lipperty, with bitterness ; ‘I’ve certainly read it somewhere.’

‘I may have gathered it from a book, mamma, and it may yet be true,’ replied Lena, with unconscious sarcasm ; ‘and I feel more and more that it is true. And, being true, I must claim to be allowed to employ such faculties as I have as best I can ; for I agree with you that it is a sin to eat the bread of idleness.’

Lena had never before given utterance to so

serious and philosophic a speech, and for a moment she felt awed at her own temerity ; but, meeting her step-mother's hard, unsympathising gaze, she was confirmed in her resolve to speak definitely, and, therefore, continued :

‘I have thought very seriously during the night upon what you said yesterday, and I have formed a resolution to work.’

‘Work won't harm you, I suppose,’ replied Mrs. Lipperty, with a sneer.

‘No, mamma ; and I mean to work very, very hard.’

‘I can't object to that, Leonora Jane ;’ and Mrs. Lipperty wondered whether Lena intended to undertake the washing, the cooking, or the window-cleaning.

‘I have made up my mind to take up a profession, and to try my chance of success.’

‘A profession. Hem ! and, pray, what profession have you selected ? The stage ?’ inquired the good lady, with withering contempt.

‘I think I might cultivate my taste for music with advantage.’

‘And may I ask what instrument you propose to take up ?’

‘The violin.’

‘Exactly! I expected as much. A man’s instrument, of course. Why not the cornet, or, better still, the trombone, a still more manly one? Is this the kind of “work” which it becomes a young girl to do? Oh, I’m shocked! I’m ashamed of you, Leonora Jane!’

‘I believe ladies play the violin now-a-days,’ argued Lena, with gentle remonstrance.

‘Oh, dear yes! “Ladies” do queer things now-a-days—things that I blush to think of, and fiddling is one of them, and the very last thing they study is modesty, and no doubt you’ll soon be as forward as any of them! But mind, Leonora Jane, I wash my hands of it. I know your obstinate disposition, and I see you are bent on going headlong to destruction. Oh, I’m truly thankful your poor, dear father isn’t here to see this day! To think that a daughter of his should come to this, to fiddle! To perform, I suppose, in those sinks of iniquity, the theatres! Don’t ask my consent, for you won’t get it! The sin shan’t lie at my door. Remember that!’

‘I hope nothing but good will come of it,

mamma; and, with God's blessing, no harm can.'

'Don't, don't! I can't stay and hear you talk so, Leonora Jane. It's profane! But, of course, where people give themselves up to the vanities and follies of this wicked world, they cast reverence to the winds!'

Lena made no attempt to justify herself; she had announced her resolution, and her step-mother's vituperation seemed the natural consequence.

'I suppose,' continued Mrs. Lipperty, tauntingly, 'that, as you have money of your own, you intend to exercise this "freedom" elsewhere than under my roof?'

'I had no such idea, mamma.'

'Then you actually expect to be allowed to follow your unhappy bent here, in spite of my disapproval?'

'All I ask is to be permitted to work out my own future and strive to be a credit to you, mamma.'

'If you wish to work and be a credit, you can help Maria; but I'll have no fiddling here!'

‘Very well, mamma. I can obey you in this,’ replied Lena, without bitterness or vexation; and Mrs. Lipperty, satisfied in having scourged her step-daughter to the best of her ability, rose from the table and quitted the room.

Left alone, and the necessity for firmness and self-control removed, Lena’s fortitude gave way, and, burying her face in her hands, she burst into tears.

‘No sympathy, no encouragement, no friend!’ she murmured amid her sobs; ‘it is very, very hard. Not in the whole world is there one to whom I can turn for counsel. Mrs. Sparragus is kind and good; but, if I told her my trouble, she might blame mamma, and I do not wish that. No, I must bear my trials like others. It rests with myself to overcome them. Twenty friends could only cheer me to be brave, and I must be brave without them.’

Lena’s tears had dried, and her fair face was illumined by the enthusiasm which stirred her heart. Sweeping back her rich, auburn tresses, and drawing a deep breath, as though a burden had been cast off, and the armour of a clear conscience put on, she looked the *beau ideal* of

an English girl, for character, independence, and natural grace were visible in every gesture. She was transformed. The apathy, born of dull surroundings and perpetual preachings-at, had given place to animation, and even gaiety, at the bare idea of the difficult task she had resolved upon. A future seemed to open out as she dwelt upon it, and, with the fervour of simple faith, she offered up a prayer for strength and guidance in the arduous study she had determined to pursue.

When she rose from her knees she wore a smile of contentedness which was evidence that a life-long burden had been laid aside.

CHAPTER V.

THE INTRUDER.

IN spite of Dr. Eustace's encouraging advice, his own momentary good resolution, and the tempting offer of patronage made by Glare and Gooley, Graham Aspen, unaware of the diverse interests in himself which he had unwittingly created, allowed day after day to pass without profitable employment. A physical and mental reaction had set in, and vacuity of thought and nervous inactivity held him in thrall, which he had no energy to throw off. The pictured face of his idea was the one object of contemplation, and, as we have seen, whenever his eyes were satiated with the worship of it, he piously covered it over, and, locking his door behind him, strolled abroad.

On more than one occasion he had, on returning to his room, been startled by the ruffled appearance of the scarf which enveloped the painting. Surely it had been disturbed? And a spasm of jealous anger would thrill him. But, on reflection, he admitted the possibility of his having brushed past it as he hurried; or it may have been the draught from the closing door that disturbed it. And the suspicion was dismissed again and again. Feeling more languid than usual, Graham one day returned almost immediately after quitting his room, and, mechanically locking his door and removing the key, he flung himself upon his bed, and drew the curtain, composing himself for sleep. He had not remained long in that condition, when he thought he heard the sound of a foot without, and presently it seemed that a key grated in the lock.

Surely he must be dreaming! But no, beyond a doubt, the handle is turned, and the door opens, and is gently closed behind a figure. Through the narrow opening of the curtains, Graham gazes spell-bound, and sees a rough and ungainly youth advance into the room.

The artist is too astonished to move, or challenge the intruder, who looks more like a phantom than a marauder ; and all he can do is to watch and wait. The youth had a small package in his hand, which he laid aside, and at once seated himself on the chair Graham occupied opposite the easel on which stood his ideal portrait, and carefully removed the scarf. He remained for some moments rapt in contemplation of the work which Graham, hardly able to contain his indignation, expected to see him take possession of, and then decamp. Instead, however, of doing so, he made himself quite at home on Graham's chair, and, unfolding the package which he had brought with him, exposed to view a copy of Graham's ideal head, which he placed beside the original, and glanced from one to the other with the air of an art-critic. Presently he opened his colour-box, and proceeded to advance his work, when Graham, no longer able to remain a passive observer of the sacrilegious act, sprang from his bed, and, bursting through the curtains, threw himself upon the awe-stricken intruder, shrieking,

‘Wretch ! Villain ! What are you doing ?’

The petrified youth dropped his colour-box, sank on to his knees, and burst into tears.

‘Speak, rascal, or I’ll choke you!’ and Graham seized him by the throat.

‘I—I—was only trying to copy your beautiful picture, sir,’ replied the boy, in broken accents.

‘Imp! where did you get the key from?’ demanded the enraged artist, holding a fist against the lad’s nose.

‘It’s mother’s, sir, please.’

‘Mother! who is your mother?’

‘Mrs. Starkie, sir, downstairs,’ answered the terrified youth, still on his knees.

‘Mrs. Starkie, the landlady?’

‘Yes, please, sir.’

Graham Aspen relaxed his hold of the lad’s throat and ran to the bell, which he rang violently.

Mrs. Starkie hurried up in alarm and entered the room gasping for breath. Graham pointed with out-stretched arm and menacing finger to the shivering culprit in the chair.

‘Do you know this boy, Mrs. Starkie?’ he demanded, in tragic tones.

‘Why, sir, if it ain’t our Jem!’ answered the landlady, hardly able to articulate intelligibly.

‘Did you know he was in the habit of entering my studio in my absence?’

‘Lor’ bless you, sir, I never drempt of such a thing!’ responded Mrs. Starkie with evident veracity.

‘But you knew there was a duplicate key to my door?’

‘Well, it’s this way. You see, sir, lodgers is always a-losing their keys, and so I has two keys to all the doors in case of haccidents.’

‘And to all the drawers and tea-caddies too, I suppose, Mrs. Starkie,’ retorted Graham, severely caustic.

‘Good gracious, no! sir. I shouldn’t go and do no such thing!’ answered the landlady, her susceptible feelings deeply harrowed by the imputation.

‘Jem, you evil, bad boy, how dare you do sich a thing?’ she continued, wiping her eyes with her apron.

Jem, caught red-handed, could offer nothing in explanation or extenuation.

Turning to Aspen, Mrs. Starkie proceeded to explain :

‘To tell you the truth, sir, I can’t make nothing of ’im. He’s that stoopid, I’ve no patience!’

‘In what respect is he stupid?’ enquired Graham, gradually mollified by the bearing of the hardened criminal.

‘He’s that dull, sir, that he can’t hardly clean knives decently, let alone boots, and as for winders, why, he makes em dirtier than they was before!’

‘Is there nothing else he can do?’ asked the artist, relaxing more and more.

‘I sends him of errands sometimes, but lor’, sir, it’s a thousand to one but he goes to the wrong shop, and brings home a mutton-chop instead of a pound of candles. He can’t be relied on for nothink, his head’s so choke full of they everlasting picters!’

‘Pictures?’

‘Oh yes, sir, morning, noon, and night, drawing, drawing, drawing, till I’m downright sick! Why, there’s never a bit o’ clean paper lying about but Jem goes and spiles it ’mediately.’

‘How?’

‘Why, by drawing picters on it! And the worst of it was, his uncle went and give him a sovereign, and I told him to go and buy hisself a jacket for Sunday.’

‘And didn’t he do so?’

‘Not a bit of it, sir. Away he went and bought a box of nasty paints,’ replied Mrs. Starkie, pathetically.

The culprit sat overwhelmed at the too true recital of his misdeeds and timorously raised his large bright eyes to Graham, who at the moment seemed to him justice personified; and if the artist had pronounced judgment there and then, and condemned him in the extremest of penalties, it would have been submitted to without the faintest protest, so veracious was the long catalogue of his offences as set forth by his mother. Graham’s eye caught his, and there passed from one to the other a magnetic current of human sympathy which was to last through life.

Graham took up the copy of his ideal work which Jem had in his abashment secreted under

a chair, and he was astonished at the original talent displayed in it.

‘Did you do the whole of this, my boy?’ he enquired, in a reassuring tone.

‘Yes, sir,’ answered Jem, wondering whether that was an aggravation of his crime.

‘Has he ever had instruction?’ asked the artist, turning to Mrs. Starkie.

‘Lor, no! the mischief is, he teaches hisself, and I’m downright tired of boxing ’is ears, that I am!’

Graham took the lad’s hand.

‘Jem, I was more than angry with you for coming in here as you did; but, now that I understand your object, I not only forgive you, but I am really pleased. In future you are free to come and work here whenever you wish, and if I can help you, as I think I can, I will—if you will let me!’

Jem burst into tears.

‘Ah, you may well be ashamed of yerself, Jem!’ exclaimed Mrs. Starkie, admonishingly, ‘for I quite expected Mr. Aspen was a-going to give you in charge. To think that a child of

mine should dare to go into lodgers' rooms unbeknown !'

'My dear Mrs. Starkie,' remonstrated Graham, 'I think we have both said enough about his misdeeds. He didn't touch either my tea-caddy or my purse. The only thing he has robbed me of has been—my conceit. Leave me to punish him for that in my own way, will you ?'

'With all my 'art, sir, and I hope the flogging you give him will do him more good than mine does, for I'm downright sick and tired of wal-lopping 'im !' And Mrs. Starkie, relieved of a hopeless burden and the bane of her existence as a struggling landlady, left her incorrigible son at her lodger's mercy, and descended to her room below.

Graham turned to Jem, and, seeing tears still trickling down his face, spoke to him sympathetically :

'Are you unhappy, my boy ?'

Jem made no reply, but sobbed afresh. Graham repeated the inquiry, 'Are you unhappy ?'

'Oh ! no, sir. I am happy, very happy.'

'Is that a reason for your tears, Jem ?'

‘Yes, sir.’

Jem, in truth, was in tears of joy and an overflowing heart. The artist comprehended it at its true value, and he felt happy too.

As a pretext for being alone, Graham desired the youth to fetch his drawings for his inspection, for he needed solitude to reflect upon a new and unexpected vista which seemed to open out in his life.

‘Three years!’ he meditated, pressing his hand to his throbbing temples; ‘Eustace gives me three years—and three years seemed a lifetime when I had scarcely looked or cared for as many months; but, now that an interest in life has suddenly sprung into existence, how far too short a time it is for me to do what I would for this gifted boy! Only three short years to assist the throes of genius! As for myself, all the power that was ever in me is spent in this one device;’ and Graham turned to the face of his ideal; ‘all is gone from me now! But I can be a foster-father, if not the father of something that may be fit to live. This boy’s natural bent may be a power in art—why not? and it shall be mine to watch its growth!’

Jem presently re-entered laden with a heap of miscellaneous scraps of all shapes and sizes, which he bashfully placed on the table beside Graham, who at once glanced over them. They consisted of drawings in pen and ink, pencil and water-colours. Sunsets, clouds, flowers, and even efforts in landscape, various objects of furniture, his mother in all views, and even a sketch of Graham himself—the one object of Jem's secret veneration.

The young artist was prepared to find indications of latent ability, but he was astonished at the promise shown in the sketches before him. He could discern no special inclination in favour of any one subject—the youthful essayist seemed equally attracted by figure subjects, landscape, or cloudscape. That the performances were immature, crude, and tentative was evident and unavoidable; but Graham was astonished at their near approach to accuracy, their decision of touch, and that pardonable exaggeration which gives evidence of boldness and breadth of view.

Without betraying the impressions made upon him, or injudiciously applauding Jem's

performances, Graham laid a gentle hand on his shoulder and drew him to his side.

‘How old are you, my lad?’ he asked.

‘Seventeen, sir.’

‘And how long have you tried to draw?’

‘I can’t remember, sir. Always, I think.’

‘How old were you when you drew this?’
pointing to a sketch of a cat.

‘It’s further back than I can tell you; the cat has been dead ever so many years.’

‘And these sunsets and clouds?’

‘Last year, sir.’

‘And which do you like doing best, cats or sunsets?’

‘Oh, sunsets!’ responded Jem, promptly.

‘Here are drawings of men and women; which do you prefer,—figures or sunsets?’

Jem reflected and was at a loss for an answer.

‘I like both, sir.’

The reply pleased Graham greatly, it indicated largeness of capacity. Taking up a drawing of a chair, he asked the youth why he made the back legs so much shorter and slighter than the front.

‘Because they look shorter and thinner.’

‘Why is that?’

Jem could not explain.

‘Shall I show you how to find whether the legs of this chair are right or wrong?’

‘Oh, yes, sir, please,’ answered Jem, with enthusiasm; whereupon Graham drew on the paper the simple lines of perspective, explaining the meaning of the terms and their application, which Jem imbibed with avidity.

‘You see now that the legs of your chair are not quite right,’ demonstrated Graham.

‘No, sir, the back legs are not short enough, after all!’ exclaimed Jem, laughing at the discovery.

‘Exactly. And you will in all your drawings remember my first lesson, and make your distances and proportions correct by the aid of such lines as I have drawn?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘And shall I teach you all I know, Jem?’ enquired Graham, in tones which bespoke more than kindness; and the question sent such a thrill through Jem that he was mute so far as making an articulate reply. He seemed bewildered between surprise and joy.

‘Perhaps it would be better if I got you placed in a school under masters?’

‘Oh no, sir, with you!—with you!’ replied Jem, spasmodically.

‘But why with me?’ enquired Graham.

Jem turned to the face on the easel.

‘I only want to be taught to paint like that, sir! But I never, never shall!’

‘Poor boy!’ meditated Graham, ‘how little he knows of the power that is in him!’

Taking up a sunset he asked how he obtained a certain tint. Jem replied that he did not know.

‘But you didn’t find this grey in your colour-box?’

‘No, sir; I mixed all sorts together till I got what I wanted!’

‘My boy, the best painter can do no more. The only difference is that they know how to mix and do it; while you do it without knowing.’

‘Yes, sir,’ answered Jem, not quite grasping the antithetical explanation Graham had propounded, and which was a sincere compliment to the lad, who, in fact, accepted it as a rebuke in all meekness.

The colloquy at that moment was interrupted by a knock at the door.

‘Come in!’

And Mrs. Starkie entered.

‘If you’ve quite done chastising of that naughty boy, Mr. Aspen,—and I’m truly obliged to you, sir, and I ’ope you’ve give it ’im well!—I want him to clean the knives and peel the pertaters!’

‘Mrs. Starkie,’ said Graham, placing himself between his landlady and her son, ‘don’t you think it is quite time he earned his own living?’

‘Earn his living, Mr. Aspen! Lor’ a mercy me! Why, he’ll never earn the salt he eats!’

‘Well, do you know, Mrs. Starkie, I think of giving him a trial.’

‘You, Mr. Aspen?’ exclaimed the landlady, incredulous, and doubtful of her lodger’s sanity.

‘Yes. I find I want assistance, and Jem, you know, is rather fond of mixing colours.’

‘Oh, drat him, yes, those nasty paints, he’s for ever messing hisself with ’em! and wipes them brushes on towels or anythink!’

‘Well, Mrs. Starkie, if you see no objection to his making these messes in here instead of

downstairs, I propose to engage him on the spot to help me at a pound a month.'

Mrs. Starkie threw up both her hands in wonderment, and looked from Jem to Graham, and from Graham to Jem in complete confusion of brains.

'That, you know, will be at the rate of twelve pounds a year, Mrs. Starkie, and I daresay you will be able to get a girl to clean knives and peel potatoes far better than Jem, at half that sum,' continued Graham; 'and you'll have no more of this horrible litter down below,' indicating the pile of drawings on the table and floor, 'and that will be worth something considerable, eh?'

'But, Mr. Aspen, you're a-joking, surely? You can't be serious?'

'I never felt more serious in my life!' and Graham spoke the literal truth.

'Well, Mr. Aspen,' replied the landlady, wiping her face with the back of her hand, and planting her feet firmly in evidence of unbounded resolution, 'I can only say I've too much respect for you to consent to your assaddling yourself with such a bargain as Jem

to save me, which it is my 'ard lot to bear, and I'm very thankful, sir, jest the same; but, no, I've got a conscience, I 'ave, and I couldn't take advantage of anybody, let alone a lodger as I respecks like my own flesh and blood!' and Mrs. Starkie mopped her face, as if it had been a kitchen utensil.

This view of the proposition disconcerted Graham considerably, and he felt rather non-plussed. However, he continued:

'But if I wish it, Mrs. Starkie, I can't possibly blame you, whatever happens.'

'Course you wouldn't, Mr. Aspen. Why, you're the last man to do sich a thing as blame me! You've not been in my house for over a year without my finding out that you're the kindheartedest young gentleman as ever was! and I'm not a-going to let my Jem upset your peace o' mind if I know it. There!'

'You don't quite understand me, Mrs. Starkie. I really must have assistance, you know.'

'As for that, Mr. Aspen, I won't say, and if you like I'll look about for a good handy boy or girl from the Orphin School. There's Mrs. Soper's Betsy, a willin', 'ard-working gall as'll

keep the place tidy, and she washes beautiful! and I know she'd rub your paints well, for I've seen her hearthstone the door-step, and it's a sight to see her do it, it is!

Graham was getting desperate: he was at a loss for arguments:

'It is truly kind of you, Mrs. Starkie, to have such consideration for me, but my mind is made up. I engage Jem!'

'Then, Mr. Aspen, for your own good I must say no, I wouldn't for the world!'

'You refuse to consent?' demanded Graham, fiercely, while Jem could be heard sobbing in the corner of the room.

'Course I do, Mr. Aspen, or I shouldn't be no friend!' retorted the landlady, decisively.

Graham was baffled. However, he had one more card to play:

'Very well, Mrs. Starkie, I see I have been with you too long. I give you notice to vacate this room this day week.'

It was Graham's trump card, and it won the trick.

Mrs. Starkie clasped her hands together, and gave evidence of great internal commotion by

dropping into a chair. Graham followed up his advantage :

‘This day week I leave you. I see by a bill in the window opposite there’s a room to let there !’

‘Oh, Mr. Aspen, would you be so cruel to a poor widow?’ pitifully pleaded the landlady, ‘to go and leave her jest because she wanted to act fair by you and not let you go and do yourself no wrong? And then to lodge opposite !’

‘It rests with you, Mrs. Starkie. Let me engage Jem, and I’ll remain here—as long as I live—(Graham muttered to himself, ‘’twill be but three years!’) but, if you refuse to let Jem be with me, you can look out for another lodger in my place.’

‘Oh, sir,’ sobbed the landlady, surrendering, ‘I won’t say another word! Take the boy and keep him as long as you like for nothink! I know you’ll be glad to be rid of ’im before you’re a week older. And please remember, Mr. Aspen, that I’m not to blame. It ain’t my doing, the Lord knows it ain’t!’ Turning to her shivering son she apostrophised him, ‘Jem, you idle, good-for-nothing boy, this kind, good

gentleman is a-going to be your master ; and, when he sends you of herrands, I hope you won't make them ridiklous blunders which you does whenever I sends you ; and, when he tells you to buy a bundle of firewood, don't go and bring home a lead-pencil instead, as you did once ; and pray, for goodness sake, don't get and mess every bit of writing-paper which Mr. Aspen leaves about with them nasty paints you bought with your uncle's sovereign. Now don't ; and do try and be a credit to your mother's bringing-up. Will you, Jem ?

‘ Yes, mother,’ responded Jem, with a bursting heart, ‘ I'll try my best.’

Thereupon the landlady descended to her quarters, and left Graham and Jem friends—for life.

CHAPTER VI.

FLINDERS' FARM.

MRS. SPARRAGUS, true to the intention she had expressed, migrated to Flinders as soon as she felt equal to the journey, in the hope of regaining, in that salubrious locality, the composure which her recent escape had so cruelly disturbed, and which the too-neighbourly attentions of Mrs. Lipperty tended to dissipate rather than restore.

Flinders had been let, as we know, to a syndicate through the agency of Mr. Honeydew. The syndicate was rather limited; it consisted of Mr. Honeydew. The farm was placed in charge of a manager, named Blowers, a man of enterprise and muscle, who had been a handy-man at an infirmary and had married

an equally energetic young person who had graduated as a hospital-nurse. This worthy couple were quite at home as custodians of Flinders' Farm, which was judiciously advertised by the syndicate (through the agency of Mr. Honeydew) as the most salubrious, snugget, and best-conducted retreat for convalescents in the kingdom, in virtue of its excellent system of drainage, its quietude, its pastoral environment, fine air direct from the Downs, and a pump of pure water on the premises. Added to these hygienic advantages, there were the delights of milk from the cow, eggs fresh from the nest, a billiard-table, a racket-court, and a quiet pony to ride or drive.

Situated on a gentle slope facing the south, you had only to stand for a moment on the terrace in front of the house, to burst into rapturous panegyrics on the beauties of its site. Right away to the Surrey hills the country undulated in broad waves, on the crests of which woods and plantations rested like mossy crowns; and, here and there, mansions and homesteads nestled among their fine timber and well-cultivated land, while cattle and sheep, dotted about

in all directions, were proof sufficient that the inhabitants thereof thrived comfortably under its benignant skies. The late lamented Matthew Flinders, the owner who had given his name to the farm, possessed, beyond his genius for the invention of pills, very pronounced views on matters of hygiene, and made the farm the arena of incessant efforts to secure perfection in that respect, being convinced that length of days was attainable if due care be taken in respect of drainage, ventilation, and warm socks. Unhappily, just as he achieved the object of his ambition, he caught a fever there while disinfecting a cess-pool, and passed away from the scene of his labours,—hence the sobriquet of Flinders' Folly applied to the farm by his less enlightened neighbours.

But the syndicate, assisted by Tom Blowers, saw that great possibilities lay dormant in the place, needing only judicious development. It was known far and wide that the defunct Flinders had nearly ruined himself, in spite of the pill, in elaborating the system of drainage (which meant sanitation) which was to prolong his days indefinitely; and the syndicate con-

ceived the brilliant idea of challenging inspection by the whole medical profession, inviting editors to see for themselves the advantages of the establishment, and intimating that they were prepared to receive a limited number of boarders.

It was a decided hit. Medical men made special expeditions to Flinders. Medical journals sent experts to view, sniff, and report. The medical men and the medical experts sniffed at the drains accordingly; tasted the water; tested the milk; felt the walls; viewed the panorama from the terrace; partook of luncheon; and declared in leading articles that the place supplied a want. The natural results followed. Flinders' Farm, as well as the Flinders' Pill, was soon in everybody's mouth, and the syndicate had to increase the accommodation by adding wings and annexes for the numerous clients in search of three-score years and ten, and not a few beyond.

Mrs. Sparragus having, in the lease which her financial adviser, Mr. Honeydew, read to her, secured for herself certain accommodation at all reasonable times, she had only to

notify her intention of coming down, when the necessary preparations for her reception were made.

When Mrs. Sparragus reached Flinders, she found that rooms in the Hermitage, a cottage in the grounds adjacent to hers, were reserved for a patient of Dr. Eustace, who stood in need of a change; and, in fact, the lady, whose name was Tierney, accompanied by her daughter, arrived at the farm within a few hours of Mrs. Sparragus herself. Two or three other sojourners were in the larger house, which almost partook of the character of an hotel—or rather of one of those ‘stations’ which afford accommodation to travellers in Norway, and which are, in fact, farms;—farms cultivating crops of humanity. Mrs. Sparragus in her daily walks among the pretty lanes and by-ways, which were hedged in by wild rose and honeysuckle, necessarily encountered Mrs. Tierney and her daughter, who occasionally sketched, and a recognition would take place, then a friendly salute, and finally a more familiar greeting and an inquiry as to health. These interchanges of kindness ripened into sympathy.

‘I fear,’ said Mrs. Sparragus, one morning, addressing the elder lady, ‘that you do not gain strength very rapidly.’

‘No,’ replied the daughter, who was knitting a shawl for her mother, ‘dear mamma is so delicate. I have to take such care of her—I can’t allow her out of my sight.’

‘It is so,’ said Mrs. Tierney, laughing. ‘Hester treats me just as her child ; she watches me like a little mother. I sometimes tell her our natural positions in respect of one another are reversed.’

‘So they are, darling!’ exclaimed Hester, as if the idea could admit of no question ; ‘you’ve taken care of me long enough ; and isn’t it right that I should give back in my poor way some of your love, my precious one!’ and Hester tenderly kissed her mother, who looked intensely happy in her child’s arms.

Mrs. Sparragus watched the little drama with deep interest, and her eyes filled with tears.

‘Have you been blessed with children?’ asked Mrs. Tierney, observing her emotion.

‘Ah, no ; a child is the one blessing I desired, and heaven has denied me ; and now that I am

old I feel the want so much!' replied Mrs. Sparragus, sadly.

'I can fully enter into your feelings,' said Mrs. Tierney, sympathetically; 'but we have to be thankful for the good that falls to us, and put it to the best use.'

'That is exactly what I feel and what I wish. The years are fast running out, and it may soon be beyond my power to make good use of my means. It seems so strange, but it is true, Mrs. Tierney, I have not a friend this side the grave!' and Mrs. Sparragus fairly wept.

The two ladies looked incredulous.

'Not a friend!' they echoed. 'Impossible!'

'I suppose it is my own fault, but it is true. I have everything I can need—except a loving friend, and not having that I have nothing,' exclaimed Mrs. Sparragus, in broken accents. 'I thought lately that Providence had indeed sent me the faithful friend I pined for, for he seemed to spring out of the ground suddenly; but, ah, he vanished as he came!'

The two ladies looked more and more incredulous; whereupon Mrs. Sparragus narrated her

peril in Cheapside and her rescue by an unknown man, and Mrs. Tierney and Hester were deeply interested, and expressed their sympathy in cordial terms.

‘But wasn’t it unkind of him to refuse to tell me his name?’ asked Mrs. Sparragus, feeling sure of an affirmative response.

‘It may have seemed to you unkind,’ replied Mrs. Tierney; ‘but to my mind the act was rendered still more noble by his determination to remain unknown.’

‘But he seemed needy, and so modest, too. He was just such a person as one would be proud to benefit!’ argued Mrs. Sparragus.

‘That makes the service more and more unique,’ rejoined the other lady.

‘And for my part,’ interposed Hester, with unusual enthusiasm, ‘I think the action you have related would have lost half its beauty if the young man had given you the opportunity of rewarding him. I go even further, and say that even to know the man in the ordinary sense of common acquaintanceship, and to talk to him about that deed in ordinary conversation

would be to rob it of its grace. Had I been in his place, I should most certainly have preferred not to be known.'

Mrs. Tierney was surprised at this unwonted outburst on the part of her daughter, who, with all her endowments of head and heart, had never evinced an excess of philosophy and much less of romance.

'But, my dear child,' she replied, in tones of amused remonstrance, 'I suppose, if such a thing were to happen to you, you would be grievously disappointed if the hero fled without the reward of your grateful acknowledgments?'

'His own heart would tell him how deep those thanks were far better than anything I could express in words!'

'Yet, surely, to give utterance to them would be a satisfaction to yourself, if not to him, Hester?' urged Mrs. Tierney, more and more amused.

'To say "I thank you" is to pay the debt in the common way, and so it passes from remembrance, and there an end. I almost feel it would in such a case be sweeter to bear the burden of the debt all through life, and for ever

dwell on the service in secret, and have the actor ever before your mind's eye. It seems to me that the deed and the doer of it would thus rise high above common things and become in a manner sacred, while the interchange of thankfulness and courtesies would soon vulgarise both.'

Hester delivered this rhapsodical speech with an earnestness which gave it quite a solemn character, and indicated that it was inspired by feelings far from shallow.

Mrs. Sparragus laughed, for she failed to grasp anything so transcendental. Mrs. Tierney looked grave, for a new feature in her daughter's character seemed to be budding out.

'It's all very beautiful, Miss Hester,' said Mrs. Sparragus, mirthfully; 'but I've lived in the world a good many years, and I never met anyone before that young man who objected to be thanked for what they did for me. On the contrary, people have allowed me to thank and reward them for what they have done badly or even not at all. Your ideas are what I call poetry, and very pretty indeed as such; but you know, my dear young lady, neither poetry

nor promises butter parsnips in this world. People can't live long on them!' and Mrs. Sparragus laughed immoderately at her own illustration, till Hester laughed too.

'Now, my dear child,' said Mrs. Tierney, following Mrs. Sparragus's ironical onslaught, 'I'll put a case to you which is in some respects a parallel one. You remember when we were consulting Dr. Eustace a few weeks ago a young man fainted in the waiting-room?'

'Oh, yes, mamma,' responded Hester, with animation.

'Well, when he sank on the couch a dear girl of my acquaintance sprang to his assistance, raised him, and rested his head for a moment on her bosom till assistance arrived.'

Hester's eyes were fixed on the ground. She made no reply. The knitting-needles moved about idly and ineffectually.

'How deadly pale he looked! and what singularly fine features he had,' meditated Mrs. Tierney, wandering a moment from her argument.

Hester remained silent.

'Well, he never breathed a word of thanks;

we never heard his voice. But I well remember when, later on, Dr. Eustace told you he had been commissioned by the young gentleman to tender to you his grateful thanks for your timely aid, you were not at all displeased; but, on the contrary, you seemed touched, for your eyes filled with tears.'

Hester could not deny it. The knitting-needles played about more and more ineffectually.

'And when we reached home you talked about nothing else, and thought it so graceful and becoming in the poor invalid to send a message of thanks through the doctor. "Such deep thanks for so trifling a service," you said, with evident pleasure. Now, would you have been quite so content, Hester, if no such message had reached you? would you have been better pleased to have him mute?'

'Dear mamma, I can't argue about it. You are so dreadfully practical,' replied Hester, worsted.

'My darling child, we have to be practical in this world of give and take, and, though thanks are not very solid things, they are the small

change that help us along and make the way smooth; they must be offered and received for what they are worth.'

'I do not question that, dear mamma, and never did. I know it is so. I was thinking of the noble services we sometimes hear of, and which seem to me high above payment, and are their own reward without the giving and taking of thanks, which reduce the action to a lower level. But let us say no more about it, darling. I dare say I am quite in the wrong.'

Mrs. Sparragus desired to know the circumstances referred to by Mrs. Tierney, and the latter lady related them.

'It seems to me an exceedingly bad symptom when fainting occurs so suddenly,' opined Mrs. Sparragus.

'It was awfully sudden,' replied Hester, with undisguised pain. 'I was talking to dear mamma when he reeled and sank on to the sofa. I fear he is in a bad state.'

'Dr. Eustace almost implied that the case was hopeless,' added Mrs. Tierney.

'An artist, too!' meditated Hester, aloud; 'full of a noble ambition, probably. His heart,

no doubt, so set on fame that he does not feel the hand of death nearing him.'

'The strange thing was,' continued Mrs. Tierney, turning to Mrs. Sparragus, 'that, though he gave his name——'

'Graham,' interrupted Hester.

'Yes, Graham; he withheld his address from Dr. Eustace,—a most unusual scruple in a patient.'

'Why, he was almost as peculiar as *my* young gentleman!' exclaimed Mrs. Sparragus.

'How so?'

'He not only refused his address but even his name, for fear I should make him some return—which, between you and me, I intended doing.'

'The young gentleman to whom you refer evidently divined your purpose, but that does not explain Mr. Graham's reticence as regards the doctor. What do you think, Hester?'

'I think his natural delicacy and modesty would incline him to act so,' said Hester, in reply to her challenge; 'but no one can explain the feelings of others; and I can no more account for his silence as to his abode than for his swoon!'

Mrs. Tierney quitting the room at the moment, Hester and Mrs. Sparragus were alone, the latter continuing the topic :

‘Of course you cannot ; but I must say I *was* puzzled when my young man—I call him *mine*, you know, to distinguish him from *yours*,—refused his name for fear of being recompensed, and when he was gone I said to myself, “ Well, I don’t believe there’s another young man in all London like him.” But, you see, my dear Miss Tierney, I was wrong—there are two equally shy of being known.’

‘Did you say your young man was very needy?’ inquired Hester, after a pause.

‘He appeared very needy indeed,—just such a person as one would be proud to do a kindness to.’

‘Delicate, too, did you say?’

‘Yes, he looked pale and pinched.’

‘His age?’

‘Probably two or three-and-twenty. Poor youth, he had all the manners of a gentleman. With all his courage and strength, he was so gentle!’

Hester turned her face to Mrs. Sparragus at-

tentively, as though awaiting a still fuller description, and Mrs. Sparragus was only too ready to respond, for it was a gratification to her to relate the misadventure and glorify the hero :

‘And I don’t know when I have seen such a face as he had. It was like wax—so colourless, but the features were so fine—straight nose, firm chin, thick eyebrows—that it would be almost impossible to forget it ; in fact, it positively haunts me.’

‘Did you say his hair was black?’ inquired Hester, much interested.

‘I don’t remember saying so, my dear ; but it certainly was quite black, and soft and silky as a woman’s. Ah, he must have suspected what my feelings were and what my heart was bent upon, when I asked his name, and his pride got the better of him ;’ and Mrs. Sparragus relapsed into a serious vein.

Hester remained mute and pensive.

‘Miss Tierney,’ resumed Mrs. Sparragus, confidentially, ‘give me your opinion ; if I had told him that I desired to treat him—as—as—a son, you know, would he still have refused to give me his name?’

Hester could not reply off-hand ; the question was novel, and the springs of human action are obscure. She needed introspection ; she placed herself in the young man's position, and endeavoured to comprehend and share the feelings which seemed to have animated him, and at length she replied,

‘ I believe he would still have refused.’

‘ But why ?’ demanded Mrs. Sparragus, in surprise, and not without vexation ; ‘ pray why, Miss Hester ?’

‘ Because I believe the young man, for some reason we can never know, is indifferent to those things which most of us seek, and, if you had proposed to treat him as a son, he would have understood it as an offer of riches, which he probably despises, therefore his answer would have been “ No.” ’

The conversation was here interrupted by the return of Mrs. Tierney, and Hester, profiting by the opportunity, took up her neglected knitting and retired to her room, thoughtful and perturbed. Why perturbed ?

Because she felt as though, unawares, she had lighted upon a discovery which ought to be

respected as a secret belonging to another, and the belief had grown into conviction as Mrs. Sparragus had painted in lucid words the complexion, features, and form of her rescuer, and the conviction had penetrated her bosom as a precious thing which it would have been almost base and sacrilegious to divulge, and therefore it was something to be tenderly borne about, till circumstances should either confirm or confute the hypothesis which she had conceived.

Flinders, with its invalids, real and imaginary, was under the necessity of engaging the services of a medical attendant, not only for those residents who actually needed his care, but more especially for those who did not. To the valetudinarian, there is no one so precious as the doctor. The days and the hours intervening between his visits are counted, and the event itself is the red-letter day in the patient's calendar. There was Major Twister, as hale a man of sixty-five as you would desire to see, who became dangerously indignant if you hinted the faintest doubt that he was the most distressing living example of a dyspeptic, and

whose insulted feelings could only be assuaged by your blood in mortal combat, if you suggested that there was a reasonable probability that he would live a fortnight. The major was Dr. Dimbledon's model patient, because he declared he took the most nauseous physic with infinite relish, received him at all hours with the cordial welcome of a brother, and hung with rapt and reverent attention upon every word which fell from his inspired lips.

The weather was fine, and the vigorous major was playing at rackets with the muscular Blowers at the back of the building, when the familiar sound of the doctor's cob cantering up the gravel-drive reached his ear. To drop the ball, dart into the house, rush to his room, slip on his night-cap, and fling himself full length on to the sofa, was the work of a moment; for he had grown expert in the manoeuvre from practice—as he always received the doctor in that doleful plight.

‘Ah! D.,’ he gasped (he always abbreviated the name of his most cherished friend to the initial letter, as though the miserable remnant of his life was too short to admit of his giving it in

full), 'thankful to see you! Here I am, just where you left me.'

'My dear major, how are we to-day?' inquired Dr. Dimbledon, surveying his patient curiously.

'Just alive, but frightfully weak.'

'Tut, tut! dear me!' reflected the doctor, feeling his pulse, which beat like a navvy's.

'Can hardly stand; I'm so shaky.'

'And the appetite?'

'Don't mention it, D. It's cruel. Why, this liver of mine—or rather, what's left of it—must be as rotten as a medlar!' gasped the prostrate man.

'Sleep?' inquired the doctor.

'Not a wink, D. Not a wink! In fact, I'm played out.'

Dr. Dimbledon put on an air of deep compassion, which was a recognised part of the programme, and requested the major to allow him to inspect his tongue, when he muttered to himself, 'Tut, tut!' which, being a sound of evil omen, gave the major extreme satisfaction.

'I'm afraid you didn't take that draught last night?' he said, chidingly.

The major groaned : ‘Then my case is hopeless. Yes, sir, I have taken it with the punctuality and resolution of the Iron Duke himself, as the clock struck ten each night ;’ and he groaned again.

The doctor pursed his brows. (It was all in the programme.)

‘Not so satisfactory as I could have wished,’ he said, with a view to gratify his patient.

‘Could hardly be worse, D. ; in fact, you may almost consider me dead and buried. Now, my dear doctor, what is to be done? Hadn’t you better give me up?’

‘Oh, no, not just yet. Suppose you try a glass or two of port after dinner.’

‘And nuts?’

‘Yes ; in moderation.’

(Port and nuts had, in fact, been the invariable adjuncts to the major’s dinner for years, as the doctor very well knew.)

‘Well, D., I can only say I shall obey your orders with slavish devotion, even if it costs me my life. By the way, doctor, who is this Mrs. Sparragus, who has lately arrived here?’

‘She was the freeholder of the place, and

turned it into money ; a grocer's widow, uncommonly well off.'

'But she has presented me with a box of pills with her compliments,' urged the major, with an air of droll perplexity.

'That's explained by her being a druggist's widow, too.'

'Dash it! Did the druggist leave her well off also?'

'He left her the Flinders' Pill and Flinders' Farm, both good properties, and the grocer left her Tapioca Terrace.'

'Hem!' and the major relapsed into silence, and Dr. Dimbledon's quick ear caught a phrase or two as the patient soliloquised: 'A widow—uncommonly well off. By Jove! I'll—I'll——'

'I must now pay my respects to Mrs. Sparragus,' said the doctor, without appearing to have overheard the words which escaped the major. 'Can I be the bearer of any message from you?'

The major instantly forgot his *rôle* of moribund patient, and springing off the couch took a venetian flower-holder which he had recently purchased, and placing in it a Gloire-de-Dijon rose requested the astonished doctor to present

it to Mrs. Sparragus as a humble offering in grateful acknowledgment of her extreme kindness in sending him a box of the invaluable pill.

In the hall the doctor found Mrs. Blowers.

‘Well, doctor, how do you find our poor major?’ she enquired; and Mrs. Blowers smiled. She had not been a hospital nurse without learning a thing or two.

‘Very bad case,’ replied the doctor, with a closure of the left eyelid. ‘He’s got a complaint neither you nor I suspected, Mrs. Blowers.’

‘Indeed!’ exclaimed the ex-hospital nurse, with unfeigned surprise. ‘There’s nothing in the world the matter with the liver?’ she enquired, with confidence.

‘The soundest liver I ever came across.’

‘Digestive organs?’

‘He’s got the digestion of an ostrich.’

‘Head?’

‘Ah! a little queer there, perhaps. But it’s worse than that, Mrs. Blowers.’

‘Heart?’

‘There you have it! But it must be a secret, Mrs. Blowers, between you and me.’

'Oh yes, doctor, of course. But I really never should have thought the heart was affected. Not aneurism, eh?'

Dr. Dimbledon whispered into the ear of the ex-hospital nurse :

'It's an incipient attack of Sparragus fever. It will be violent while it lasts, as the patient is so amazingly robust for his age, but it won't kill him. He'll get over it, and stick to his port-wine and nuts !' and the doctor, laughing till he was purple in the face with the effort of suppression, proceeded to Mrs. Sparragus's room, leaving Mrs. Blowers in fits. He found the widow alone.

'I come in two capacities,' he said, gaily, 'first to offer my respects and congratulations on that wonderful escape in Cheapside, and, secondly, as an ambassador.'

'An ambassador, Dr. Dimbledon,' she repeated, with a puzzled air ; 'an ambassador?'

'Yes, from Major Twister ;' and Dr. Dimbledon presented the vase and the flower and the message, adding to the latter what appropriate supplementary periphrasis he could invent by way of garnish.

‘Really I don’t think I ought to accept such a beautiful flower-glass,’ she commented, enquiringly.

‘I assure you he considers it a wretched return for the pill, from which I sincerely hope he will derive benefit.’

‘Well, do you know, I should never have sent it to him had I not heard him say that nothing you gave him did him the least good,’ exclaimed Mrs. Sparragus, with perfect simplicity; and observing the doctor’s chagrin she hastened to add—‘but it’s no fault of yours, Dr. Dimbledon, it’s his own doing entirely, for I’m told by Mrs. Blowers that he puts away your physic in the cupboard as fast as it arrives, and there it is in rows by the dozen and not a cork drawn!’

This information was still less flattering to Dr. Dimbledon, who may, however, have seen in it an explanation of the major’s robust state of health.

‘Ah, Mrs. Sparragus, he’s a capital fellow; but a leetle—just a leetle—self-willed.’

‘Peculiar,—eh, doctor?’

‘A trifle, perhaps.’

‘Crazed?’

‘Nay, I won’t say that! Let us say infatuated,’ urged the doctor, quaintly.

‘Infatuated,’ echoed the widow, glancing at the flower which seemed eloquent testimony in support of Dr. Dimbledon’s diagnosis of the major’s complaint. ‘Whoever is he infatuated with?’

‘Oh, not with any person. It’s the pill.’

The widow appeared to be relieved, for she wiped her eyes.

‘Poor dear man, if they give him comfort, I’ll send him a supply.’

‘I feel quite sure he will not treat your pills as it seems he treats my draughts, Mrs. Sparragus,’ he rejoined, good-humouredly, whereupon they both laughed; but it would be difficult to explain why they were hilarious, for the doctor, in spite of his natural amiability, felt less vexed at his professional failure than at his ambassadorial success. ‘Is it possible,’ he reflected, as he bestrode his hack after taking leave of Mrs. Sparragus, ‘that I have incautiously established some kind of reciprocity between the major and the pill—the gilded pill! Can I, by conveying to her the major’s impassioned acknowledgments,

have awakened in her simple mind an interest which may have results no sincere friend of either of them could desire? It was certainly thoughtless of me to fling the rich widow at the major's head! She seemed quite pliant and even grateful for his civilities. It was certainly very indiscreet of me;' and Dr. Dimbledon wended homeward with vexation in his breast.

And Mrs. Sparragus had gloomy reflections too:

'Would he have sent me all that flummery along with the flower if I hadn't been well-to-do? and would everybody be so attentive if I were only a poor old woman? Ah, where shall I find anyone so truly a friend, so disinterested as that young man whom I would fain treat as a son—for no son could have done more for me than he did!—but who was too noble to consent to be thanked, much less rewarded! Oh, money, money, money!—I begin to think it drives away real friends and attracts the false;' and Mrs. Sparragus felt more alone in the world than ever.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO STUDENTS.

Two aspirants in diverse walks of art were pursuing their several studies with an ardour which bespoke enthusiasm and the possession more or less of natural gifts, and the result in each case was the rapid acquisition of skill. Zeal, which is the concentration of the mental faculties upon an object congenial to the sympathies, will shorten the dull and dreary road trodden by the novice, for his feet are winged with the energy of a passion. Lena and Jem were the students. Jem possessed the inborn feeling for art, which, like some subtle force in nature, lies dormant and unsuspected till fortuitous contact with its correlative releases the imprisoned energy and gives a new power to the world.

Lena with a more modest ambition, and lacking the swift acquisitiveness and adaptability which we call genius, had yet the indefatigable industry and resolution to succeed which are faculties hardly inferior to the former, and, if anything, more to be desired, for the reason that they are less erratic. Happily for Lena, she enjoyed a certain income secured to her under her father's Will; she was, therefore, to that extent, free from the domination of her step-mother, whose authority over her actions she had never till now for a moment questioned. Mrs. Lipperty's recent arbitrary conduct towards her had, however, precipitated a step which, soon or late, she must have taken in the assertion of personal freedom and liberty of thought, which she seemed suddenly to have discovered to be her natural right.

Having put her hand to the plough, she was not of a character to look back. She sought at once for a professional instructor of the violin, and Herr Stomper, to whom she was introduced by the chief of the musical establishment to which she repaired, at once received her as a pupil, and placed her under the care

of his wife, who was peculiarly apt in teaching the rudiments of the art, owing to her sympathetic nature no less than to her skill with the violin. Lena soon discovered that she had taken up an instrument of extreme difficulty, and for a moment she was a prey to despair. But her brave heart rallied to the occasion after a few tears, and she was braced in nerve and resolution to succeed. By nature deft, and possessing a fine ear for harmony, the ordinary drudgery of 'practice' partook more of the character of those exercises indulged in by experts in the intervals of serious work—it was not laborious plodding, but rather recreation, and it was not long before she reached the limit of the Frau's domain as instructress, and was promoted to the tutelage of the Herr.

Herr Stomper was a maestro in the full sense of the term—he schooled his pupils thoroughly; but he had an amiable weakness—he grew enthusiastic over them, and would insist that their abilities were phenomenal. He never admitted that he could turn out mediocrity even if he tried; the consequence was that everyone was a star, and therefore no one shone

in particular. But the dull level of excellence among his pupils received an eruptive impulse when, after a few months' close study and incessant fingering, Lena was prevailed upon to compete with her fellow-students in the presence of friends and amateurs gathered together at one of the Herr's periodical reunions.

It was evident that the extreme diffidence with which she took her place on the dais prepared the audience for disastrous failure, and a tolerant indifference was accorded to the trembling essayist. But, as soon as the bow began thrilling the strings of her violin, her embarrassment was dissipated and became lost in the growing interest with which she rendered the score, and, as her interest increased, her energy grew, and, with her energy, her skill. The audience, no longer inattentive, watched the young girl with keen sympathy. They noted how, after the many blunders she made, she courageously repeated the bar again and again until the fault was triumphantly purged; and, although the piece performed was simple and elementary, Lena played it with infinite feeling, and at its termination she became conscious

of the ordeal she had undergone, and with faltering step and beating heart she resumed her seat with the applause of the audience ringing in her ears. Herr Stomper gracefully received the compliments which reached him from all sides on the marvellous results of his system of instruction,—compliments which Lena, who withdrew from observation, was only too thankful to be spared.

He replied: ‘Yah; if ze Fraulein doos not blay vare well zumday zoon, it shall not be ze fault of Herr Stomper;’ and, by the gesture of his head, hands and shoulders, he seemed to add, ‘You see I am producing another phenomenon.’

But the sympathy with which Lena was greeted by strangers was not by any means reflected at No. 1, Tapioca Terrace, and the young girl had to live down the daily discouragement of her step-mother’s homilies.

‘Leonora, I can’t think how a girl brought up as you have been can all of a sudden go about the streets with that frightful fiddle-case, which looks for all the world like a baby’s coffin, in your hand! I declare it doesn’t look modest! indeed, I’m not sure it is decent! And

then to go fiddling before a room full of people ! It's hardly respectable, Leonora Jane ! and it's a mercy your poor, dear father didn't live to see the day when his only child, who used to know how to conduct herself, does such things. But, remember, I wash my hands of the consequences, as I said before.'

Lena would reply, if at all, in a few words : ' Whatever happens, mamma, I can never reproach you ;' and she would go her way sorrowfully yet unfalteringly ; but the way was all the more hard to traverse since her only relative strewn it with thorns.

Among her fellow-pupils was Ethel Clive, who made advances towards Lena, whom she had long recognised as a girl of a disposition congenial to her own ; but Lena, not yet free of the insularity and indifference generated by her solitary life and narrow training, received her kindly approaches with discouraging formality, which gave Ethel pain she was generous enough to conceal. Again and again she offered her the little courtesies which are the instincts of a cultivated mind ; and Lena, notwithstanding her ready appreciation, re-

sponded gracefully and sweetly enough, but in a manner which did not invite nearer familiarity.

Ethel, the daughter of Mr. Clive, a city magnate, was a girl of singularly frank and genuine character, and the more difficult of approach Lena seemed to be the more desirous she felt to secure her friendship, until at length in desperation she one day fairly clasped the astonished Lena in her arms, and, kissing her, said, 'I love you, Lena; why may we not be friends?'

Lena was at a loss for words to reply, for she was overcome, and could only kiss Ethel in return.

'Why do you always avoid me?' asked Miss Clive, looking into her eyes, which were filling with tears.

'I never thought of avoiding you, dear Miss Clive.'

'Don't call me "Miss Clive;" call me Ethel, if you care for me.'

'I never thought of avoiding you, Ethel dear; it is only my foolish way.'

'I thought you had, perhaps, so many

friends you did not care to add me to the number.'

Lena sighed :

'I have not many friends.'

'Then all I can say is, you ought to have. How is it? Don't you go out much?'

'I never go anywhere excepting to tea-meetings at chapel with mamma,' replied Lena, with perfect simplicity.

Ethel's first impulse was to burst into laughter, but the grave and earnest face of her friend repressed the inclination in a moment, and she became quite subdued. Her habit of mixing in society had quickened her intelligence and *savoir-faire*, and she understood at once that Lena must be dealt with tenderly as a child, and the narrow range of her experience be treated with respect.

Notwithstanding the wide difference between the two girls, speaking in a worldly sense, there was sufficient in common to make their divergence a foil to each ; in fact, each seemed the complement of the other. Ethel's vivacity and her acquisition of *ton* in society were charm-

ingly contrasted with Lena's unobtrusive demeanour and her almost ascetic simplicity of attire, while they possessed in an equal degree that freshness and purity of heart which are the brightest jewel in the zone of our English maidens.

Lena and Ethel were not long in learning the story of each other's lives. Lena's was uneventful enough; she had chiefly to listen to Ethel's recital of her travels, friendships, adventures, and so forth. She described her father, the kindest and most indulgent of fathers (she had never known her mother), and she should not rest till she had introduced her friend to him; in fact, he was impatient to make her acquaintance.

After much coaxing, Lena consented to accompany her companion to Regent's Park, where she resided, and one day after their studies she returned in the brougham with Ethel to luncheon. The sumptuousness of her friend's home dazed the simple girl; the luxury of the surroundings and the profusion of the table almost distressed her, and she was half-

disposed to accept her step-mother's denunciation of the rich as well-grounded, and to admit with her that in taking up the fiddle she was plunging into the vortex of dissipation,—for were not, she asked herself, costliness of decoration, richness and elegance of furniture, variety of viands, wasteful excess? and was not excess dissipation? But when Ethel, in describing her father's character, told her how largely and widely and secretly he gave, how he built cottages, established soup-kitchens, endowed almshouses, and visited the sick, she admitted to herself that he was a prince among men, and that he deserved to live like a prince.

She found Mr. Clive as plain in manner as he was magnificent in deed; as destitute of assumption as he was abundant in sympathy. He took great interest in his modest visitor, and, while studying Lena's character, drew from her all sorts of little confidences about her home and neighbours. He had never heard of Tapioca Terrace, or of Mrs. Sparragus, or even Mr. Honeydew, a fellow-citizen—excellent man, no doubt—but the Flinders' Pill and Flinders' Farm, oh, yes, he knew them both

by repute,—admirable institution that farm—excellent specific that pill, for all he knew to the contrary.

But it interested him greatly to hear that Miss Lipperty knew the owner of the famous farm and still more famous pill, and that terribly narrow escape which Miss Lipperty had described, how distressing! Why, he remembered the circumstance quite well, owing to an incident connected with it. Had Miss Lipperty ever heard of the sketch-book? No? Did not Mrs. Sparragus complain of having lost a sketch-book? No? Then it must have belonged to the young hero, for it was picked up exactly where the lady was rescued, and he was evidently an artist, and one of no mean ability. But it seemed he was unconscious of the value of his sketches, or indifferent as to their recovery, for he had never taken any steps whatever with that view.

It was now Lena's turn to be interested in the artist,—or, rather, to experience a great revival of the interest she had felt from the day she had caught a glimpse of his pale, handsome face and slight but well-proportioned

figure as he withdrew from No 2, and when Mrs. Sparragus recited his heroic action her interest ripened into admiration; and now her curiosity was rewarded by a discovery: he was an artist—a painter! and painting had peculiar charms for her.

‘Oh,’ she meditated, ‘what a pleasure it would be, were it possible to discover the young man and make—Mrs. Sparragus happy! To learn all about him, his home, his habits, his family, to tell—Mrs. Sparragus! Oh what joy to accomplish all this for—Mrs. Sparragus’s sake!’ Such thoughts as these flitted unbidden through Lena’s mind, and stirred her heart strangely as Mr. Clive, offering his arm, conducted her down the richly-carpeted stairs, and handed her, with Ethel, into the carriage which was to take her to Tapioca Terrace.

‘Remember, Miss Lena,’ he said, as he bade her adieu, ‘you are Ethel’s cherished friend, and therefore you will always be welcome here. Promise that you will come often.’

Lena faltered her thanks.

‘Papa says “often.” Please answer him,

dear,' said Ethel, imploringly; 'say you will come often.'

'I will come sometimes; I cannot leave dear mamma often,' she added, gravely.

'No, no, we must not be selfish, Ethel; Mrs. Lipperty finds it hard to spare her, I am sure. We shall be grateful whenever she allows us to have her daughter.'

And, the signal being given, the carriage drove off.

'Lena,' said Ethel, as they sped along, 'I should so like to see your mamma. May I step in with you?'

Lena found herself in a difficulty; she had had such painful evidence of her step-mother's hostility to the pursuit she had taken up, and which she denounced as odious frivolity, that she was very doubtful of the reception which any musical friend, or indeed any acquaintance of hers, might receive; but then, again, it was more than probable that, when Mrs. Lipperty saw how refined and sweet a companion she had found, all her objections and evil vaticinations would take flight like vapours before the

rising sun, with the happy result that henceforward she would encourage with her approval the efforts she was making to accomplish herself in a difficult art.

‘Yes, dear, I shall be glad for you to know mamma; she will be pleased to see you.’

When the brougham reached Tapioca Terrace Mrs. Lipperty, who was at the window, concluded that it stopped at the wrong gate, and that it was a visitor for Mrs. Sparragus, who had just returned from Flinders’. This assumption opened up a wild field for conjecture. Who could it be? Somebody after her money, no doubt, or perhaps a lawyer come to confer about a fresh Will, or possibly—but all speculation was suddenly arrested by the appearance of Lena and a lady emerging from the carriage and entering the gate. Mrs. Lipperty was stupefied.

‘What is the meaning of this? Isn’t it bad enough for her to go and pick up with all manner of characters, but she must have the audacity to bring her people here! I’m not going to countenance such behaviour by seeing the person. No, indeed!’ and Mrs. Lipperty

ascended the stairs, and reached her bed-room as Lena knocked at the door. Admitted by the servant before Mrs. Lipperty could forbid it, Lena was in the act of conducting her friend to the sitting-room, when her step-mother, leaning over the banisters, called out, in an acrid voice :

‘Leonora Jane, what person are you bringing into my house?’

‘It is Miss Clive, mamma, a friend of mine.’

‘A friend of yours! and pray what right have you to go and pick up what you call friends without my sanction?’

‘But surely, mamma,’ remonstrated Lena, in agony, ‘you will approve when I tell you——’

‘I don’t wish for any explanations, Leonora Jane. You have begun by acting in direct defiance of my wishes, and this is the first result.’

Ethel could not remain silent. Her affection for her friend compelled her to speak.

‘May I have the pleasure of a few words with you, Mrs. Lipperty?’ she said, with all the urbanity she could command.

‘Certainly not, madam.’

‘But is it right to reproach Lena before you know?’ expostulated Ethel, in astonishment.

‘I know quite enough, madam. Mind, I don’t say there’s anything wrong about you. No, I’m too charitable to even suppose such a thing. You may be an angel of purity and piety ; but, all the same, I don’t choose to have Leonora Jane bringing people here I know nothing about.’

‘Then, of course, I will leave at once.’

‘Thank you ;’ and Mrs. Lipperty slammed her bed-room door by way of intimating that the interview was concluded. When Ethel turned to Lena she found her sobbing, her face buried in her hands.

‘Poor child!’ she said, tenderly embracing her, ‘I now understand what was in your thoughts when you said you had not many friends ; and I see why you hesitated to bring me home. *Home!*’ and Ethel burst into tears. ‘Lena,’ she said, holding her in her arms, ‘you will continue to be submissive and you will not suffer in vain. These are the trials which bring out the good that is in us. I see its effect already in you. So cheer up, dear, and remember what papa said.’

Lena found it hard to speak.

‘You are both too kind to me,’ she replied, in broken accents.

‘Papa told you I was much attached to you ; but now that I have seen your home, Lena, I think I love you more than ever. Remember, dear, that you have sincere friends at Regent’s Park ;’ and, with another tender embrace, the girls parted and the brougham drove away.

When Ethel and her father met in the evening, she related the circumstances attending her visit to Tapioca Terrace, and Mr. Clive was no less pained than herself.

‘I wish,’ he said, after reflecting, ‘that you could prevail upon Lena to pay you a long visit ; you seem so happy together. Nature has denied you that which you would have prized so much—a sister ; but Providence seems to have thrown one in your way. Do you think she would consent to come ?’

‘Mrs. Lipperty would never consent, papa, and therefore Lena would not.’

‘I fear it is so,’ replied Mr. Clive, sorrowfully ; ‘submission is second nature in her, and, as it is evident her step-mother is entirely averse to her

musical studies, nothing but a powerful instinct in that direction, and, indeed, a passion for the art, has induced her to go counter to Mrs. Lipperty's wishes. Would it avail at all, Ethel, if I called on that lady ?

‘I think, papa, if you were to make the acquaintance of the lady living next door to her, Mrs. Sparragus, and interest her in Lena's musical talent, much good might come of it, for the poor girl tells me they are very intimate with their neighbour, who is as kind and generous as Mrs. Lipperty is evidently harsh, and who is, moreover, attached to Lena, as indeed everyone must be who knows her.’

‘But I don't quite see how I can call upon a lady to whom I am a perfect stranger,’ argued Mr. Clive. ‘Stay,’ he exclaimed, after a few moments' cogitation, ‘isn't she the owner of Flinders’ ?’

‘Yes, papa, she is or was. I believe it is sold.’

‘Then I can with perfect propriety call to confer with her on the salubrity of that famous resort, and, indeed, we may some day visit the place.’

‘I should be delighted to do so,’ rejoined Ethel, with enthusiasm.

‘I’ll drive over there to-morrow; it will be quite interesting to talk to the old lady about her narrow escape, and tell her about the sketch-book which is waiting to be claimed.’

Had No. 1 and No. 3, Tapioca Terrace, had the faintest idea of the energy of the gentleman who purposed to pay a visit to No. 2, and who never failed in any beneficent action which he had once resolved upon, they would have deplored more than ever the unfortunate circumstance which had brought it all about.

Another aspirant in another branch of art was meanwhile strenuously ploughing his way along the rough and difficult path of rudimentary study. Jem Starkie, under the guiding hand of Graham Aspen, advanced with extraordinary rapidity in the acquisition of the technicalities and principles of his art. He evinced the utmost aptitude to grasp every essential element as it was explained. The laws of proportion, perspective, and chromatic harmony were understood almost as soon as expounded, and discussed with an intelligence which shamed Graham

himself; and, in fact, that expert limner and skilled colourist confessed to himself that in teaching Jem he learnt a great deal from his humble pupil. And this similarity of taste and predilection attached the young man and the youth more and more to one another, till from friends they grew to be brothers in the noblest sense of the word.

Graham thought nothing of the days and weeks devoted to fertilising the rare natural gifts Jem possessed, and which already gave promise of rich results. Graham's life, hitherto dulled and weighted by the burden of suffering, seemed to be reanimated by labours which under ordinary circumstances would have prostrated him. The cough which used to shatter him so cruelly came and passed unnoticed; the hours of wakefulness, hitherto so regular in their recurrence, grew fewer and more rare; appetite, which he could hardly say existed at all, revived so palpably that Mrs. Starkie persisted in charging Jem with surreptitiously devouring her lodger's viands, which, since his admission to the artist's sanctum, had disappeared with alarming regularity and rapidity,—results all

really traceable to the happy influence of the stimulus given to his earnest nature by the young and zealous neophyte. The face of Graham's ideal, hitherto kept jealously screened from view, was always exposed to Jem, and he, who formerly feasted upon it surreptitiously and burglariously, now gazed upon it with all the freedom and enjoyment of actual possession.

'Whose portrait is it?' he one day inquired, his curiosity on the point being for the first time aroused. 'I don't remember any lady coming here to sit while you were painting it.'

'No one ever sat for it; it was spiritually discerned,' replied Graham, with solemnity.

'Spiritually! I don't quite understand,' said the puzzled student.

'I heard a voice, and immediately saw the face.'

'Where?'

'In my mind's eye, Horatio.'

Jem was more puzzled than ever.

'Is it like the lady whose voice you heard?'

'That I shall never know. Nor do I think I care to know.'

Jem stared in incredulity.

‘Had you been in my place, Jem, I dare say you would have desired to see the girl whose voice alone thrilled every fibre of your nature?’

‘Certainly I should.’

‘I have no such wish.’

Jem found it difficult to suppress an ejaculation of amazement.

‘’Tis strange!’ he meditated.

‘No, my dear Jem, it is not strange. You will some day admit that the ideal in art is fraught with purer joy than the actual, just as imagination is a higher faculty than sense.’

‘You told me the other day never to paint without Nature.’

‘And I repeat it again and again. But an artist must do more than copy; he must create. Study beauty, Jem, till it becomes photographed, so to speak, on your mind. Your mind will intensify the beauties, and add others of its own. Transfer the picture, then, from your mind to your canvas, and you produce a work which will be remembered.’

Graham propounded his dogma with all the gravity of a professor. Since Jem had sat at

his feet, he found the dictatorial habit grow upon him, and, as the youth received all he said with the reverence accorded to gospel, he evidently tried to live up to his new dignity and responsibility.

Moreover, Graham felt his importance growing in other quarters. He had received a letter from Messieurs Glare and Gooley, who had discovered his address on the back of the picture they had purchased of him, anxiously inquiring whether he had finished the pendant to it which they had commissioned him to paint; and, as Graham's funds were pretty well exhausted, he had been industriously painting from the remembrance of a lost sketch of three graceful birch-trees, which he had made down in Surrey, and which he called 'The Sisters,' and to which he had just put the finishing touches—touches so inexpressibly sweet, and even sad, to the artist, who is loth to turn away from the labour which has been to him a joy. He called Jem to view it in its completion.

The youth stood before the picture a long time in silence.

‘Well, Jem, will it do?’ demanded the artist, impatiently.

‘It is a beautiful idea,’ he replied, in tones which indicated a mental reservation of some kind, which Graham detected.

‘But is there anything the matter with it?’

‘I’ve no doubt it’s all right. It isn’t likely you would paint anything that isn’t,’ replied the youth, with an effort.

‘My dear Jem, out with it, if anything strikes you,’ urged Graham, anxiously scanning the youth’s face.

‘I daresay I’m wrong—of course I am—but—but—is the light on the trees quite right?’

‘Go on.’

‘And, with the sun where it is, is the shadow cast by them as it would be?’

‘Go on.’

‘Oh, that’s all. I’m sure I’m too stupid to understand,—and would the background be as distinct as this in the evening?’ added Jem, trembling at his temerity.

Graham threw himself back in his chair, and, with the severity of a critic and the impartiality

of a judge, considered all the points indicated by Jem. Yes, the light was false. Yes, the shadows were impossible. Yes, the distance was falsely rendered.

‘Jem,’ he said, turning to the youth, who was reproaching himself for his audacity, ‘what an eye you’ve got! You have put your finger on three fatal defects. Of course the picture is wrong. It’s false, because it’s painted from memory, and without Nature. You have given me a lesson, Jem; and I will give you one in return. Do as I do, Jem, and never let a picture go out of your hands which is not true.’ And without compunction, and with a shout of triumph, Graham drew a keen penknife through and through the canvas, cutting it into ribbons before the amazed and horrified Jem, who endeavoured ineffectually to arrest his hand.

Thus in a moment was destroyed the where-withal to pay his way, but thus was inculcated and established the fundamental principle so dear to Graham Aspen—that truth is the first essential in art, and that to achieve truth you

must repair to the fountain of all truth, which is Nature.

A day or two after this untoward end of the young artist's labours, a second letter arrived from Glare and Gooley, enclosing a cheque for twenty pounds, and informing him that a client had just purchased the 'Queen of the Glen,' and, having paid a handsome price for it, they had pleasure in supplementing the amount he had received for it by the enclosed, etc.

This communication embarrassed Graham exceedingly. His pride revolted against accepting a honorarium from any quarter, least of all from dealers who disparaged his painting like common hucksters, and who, it was evident, only now did him justice with an object, and his first impulse was proudly to return the cheque; but on second thoughts he remembered that the price he had named for the 'Queen of the Glen' was twenty guineas; he determined, therefore, to retain ten guineas in full payment of that amount, and return the balance, thus preserving his independence, and at the same time adequately remunerating himself.

‘Jem,’ he said, with unaffected warmth, ‘this cash comes most opportunely. We will go together and paint from Nature the group of trees I endeavoured to paint from memory, and we shall see how truly you were right, and how miserably I was wrong.’

Weather favouring inclination, and timely funds being in hand, the friends proceeded to give effect to their resolution, and they went down into Surrey at once and made for one of the charming woodlands of the county where ‘The Sisters’ were enshrined in all the beauty of their spring livery; and Graham, stimulated by the presence of his critical pupil, drew, with all his ancient vigour and delicacy of colour, the graceful group of trees which Jem viewed with the rapture of a true artist, and which his companion and master rendered with perfect justice.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWISTER REDIVIVUS.

THE return of Mrs. Sparragus to Tapioca Terrace was the signal for a renewal of the healthy competition between No. 1 and No. 3, each occupant of the houses right and left being intent upon outshining the other in those little neighbourly amenities which often have a value and result out of proportion to their dimensions. Mr. Honeydew and Mrs. Lipperty in succession offered her a welcome which was unquestionably genuine in each case, for the reason that neither of them liked to lose sight of her. Nothing could be less satisfactory to her attached neighbours than for Mrs. Sparragus to make acquaintances, and they had both observed with concern that ever since that unfortunate

circumstance in Cheapside the good soul had been unsettled, and so decidedly less cordial in her reception of them that it amounted to ingratitude. She had, moreover, gone off to Flinders avowedly to compose her shattered nerves, enjoy a change, and see new faces,—ideas which had never entered the outermost precincts of her brain before the untoward event referred to. Her sudden return to town would have afforded No. 1 and No. 3 unqualified satisfaction if, in answer to confidential inquiries from Mr. Honeydew and Mrs. Lipperty, Mrs. Blowers had not assured them that she had made friends of all the visitors at the farm, and that a major had almost lived on the Flinders' Pill on purpose to prove his attachment to the proprietress of that infallible specific for the prolongation of life.

This information spread dismay within the two bosoms : Mrs. Sparragus had not only found a friend, but an actual admirer ! But this, however, hardly accounted for her unpremeditated flight from the groves of Flinders, redolent of honeysuckle, roses, mignouette, and admirers. Had Dr. Dimbledon been interrogated on oath

as to the cause, he would have had to express his suspicion that Mrs. Sparragus had been put to flight by an excess of the article she had always craved for—namely, a friend—judging from a few remarks which had escaped Major Twister during a recent visit. He found the major even more prostrate than usual, with his white night-cap drawn over his eyes like a man about to be hanged. He was almost too feeble to speak, though, singularly enough, in driving up to the door, Dr. Dimbledon happened to glance through the billiard-room window where he distinctly saw the major, in his shirt-sleeves, stretching over the table, with the cue in his hand and his right leg in the air, making a stroke, whereupon a rattling cannon followed. He could, moreover, have sworn that he heard his patient exclaim, ‘By gad, here’s the doctor!’ succeeded by a stampede and a death-like silence.

‘Ah, D.,’ he gasped, as the doctor entered, ‘here I am exactly where you left me; thankful that you haven’t thrown my case up in despair. You’re just in time to see about the last of me.’

‘So bad as that? dear me, dear me,’ replied

Dr. Dimbledon, gnawing his tongue to preserve his gravity, at the same time feeling his patient's pulse, which as usual beat like a steam-engine. 'I mustn't allow you to get low. I fear there is something on your mind.'

This latter observation was intended to offer the major an opportunity to make any confession he pleased with respect to Mrs. Sparragus. The major evaded it.

'Yes, I'm awfully low.'

'Do you persevere with the port-wine?'

'And nuts—yes, I do my best.'

'I think a lamb chop for luncheon might do no harm.'

'Oh, horror! Spare, me, D., if you have the smallest mercy! Give me physic as much as you please, but oh! spare me lamb chops;' (rump steak and mushrooms or veal cutlets and tomato sauce or truffles was the major's ordinary luncheon).

'Well, well, we won't be hard upon you. A tea-spoonful of beef-tea, every two hours—can you manage that?'

'I'll try,' sighed the major, sinking on to his pillow.

‘ Ah, I see you have faith in the Flinders’ Pill,’ said Dr. Dimbledon, gaily pointing to a half-emptied box.

This speech, like the former one, was intended to draw a confession from the major. He forgot to evade it.

‘ Yes, the old lady was good enough to send me a fresh supply. ’Pon my soul, she’s a clipper!’

‘ Clipper or no clipper, she evidently takes a great interest in your case.’

‘ Do you really think so?’ demanded the moribund major, with extraordinary earnestness and vitality.

‘ Undoubtedly; I never knew her give away a pill before.’

Twister manifested remarkable interest in the statement, considering the extremity to which he was reduced.

‘ D., is that a fact?’

‘ Ask anybody.’

‘ Well, I suppose, as a gentleman, I ought to make some little acknowledgment, eh?’

‘ Of course you thanked her?’

‘ Ça va.’

‘You might present her with another flower,’ suggested the doctor, who had been informed by Mrs. Blowers that the gallant major had been sending carnations to Mrs. Sparragus every morning.

‘Could I?’ replied the guilty major, interrogatively.

‘Why not? When young people do such things, it means something—but, my dear sir, at your age, you know——’

‘At my age!’ echoed the major, adjusting his peruke which had got askew in his excitement; ‘what do you mean to imply?’

‘Oh, I had no intention of implying anything; I merely reflected that, at our age, you know, most people have ceased to be romantic. But you’re a remarkable man, Twister, and I’ve no doubt Mrs. Sparragus would be of the same opinion if she were to express her real feelings.’

The major bolted the bait.

‘Well, do you know, from her demeanour, I believe you’re right, D. She says, “How d’ye do, major?” when we meet, in tones so con-foundedly tender that I’m dashed if they don’t almost bring my heart into my mouth!’

‘Why, my dear Twister, I shall begin to think you’re spoons on the widow!’ retorted the doctor, with affected cordiality, whereupon the major laughed and slapped his knee with a vigour altogether incompatible with his physical helplessness.

‘Egad! D., if I were a marrying man——’

‘Yes, it’s fortunate you are not.’

‘And if I were not the miserable wreck I am,’ continued the major, suddenly recollecting his desperate condition, and pulling his night-cap over his eyes, ‘by Jove! I’d—I’d—have a shot at her!’

‘And no one could blame you, Twister; but, under existing circumstances, it would of course be——’

‘Madness.’

‘Well, let us say imprudence.’

‘No, no, D., madness and nothing less!’ vociferated the patient, as Dr. Dimbledon, enjoining absolute rest and a spoonful of beef-tea every two hours, took his leave.

As soon as he had mounted the gig and driven off, the miserable wreck sprang from his couch, flung his night-cap across the room, skipped to

his writing-table, and gleefully took his seat before it.

‘I’ve humbugged old D. again,’ he ejaculated, rubbing his hands. ‘He thinks I’m played out and haven’t a week to live. He’ll be rather astonished when he hears Mrs. Sparragus is about to become Mrs. Twister! For, of course, I’ve only got to offer her the chance!’ and the major sat down to indite a love-letter.

As Dr. Dimbledon drove away he, too, busied himself with reflections :

‘Old Twister would certainly be the most consummate actor I ever met, if he didn’t o’erstep the modesty of nature. If he had told me in so many words that he meant to propose to the widow, I should not have understood it better than I did. I can’t object to his making a fool of himself by playing at illness—many people do that more or less cleverly, and it doesn’t hurt me. But I don’t intend to allow him to marry the rich widow. No, no, Twister, I can’t stand that. I’ve had my bit of fun at your expense, but this joke mustn’t go any farther.’

The following letter was handed with two carnations—red and white—to the astonished

Mrs. Sparragus the following day by the boy in buttons, who was almost as much amazed as Mrs. Sparragus on receiving from the amorous major half-a-crown to ensure its punctual delivery :—

‘Feeling wholly unable to give verbal utterance to the subject upon which existence itself hangs, I approach you, through the dull medium of pen, ink, and paper, to express, however feebly, the intensity of my gratitude for a bounteous supply of the miraculous pill. But, potent as is that infallible specific in its influence on my unworthy body, it is as nothing compared with the vitality conveyed to my better nature by a gift which brings the gentle and gracious giver before me whenever I drop one of those precious globular particles behind my vile tongue. And why? Because that superb pill at once opened my eyes and acted upon my dull and languid imagination. I felt for the first time the existence of a deep-seated obstacle to happiness which not even the pill could remove, but which the Giver could by a single word abolish for ever! Love is wont to express itself in symbols; therefore, dear madam, I send

you two carnations—a red and a white one. You will readily interpret their significance. You will not fail to observe that they are bound together in one odorous bouquet, while, dis-united and apart, the sweetness of each is wasted on the desert air, and each flower droops and prematurely fades for lack of support. Need I tell you whom the white flower represents, and whom the red? No—the heart of a true woman promptly seizes and assimilates the faintest utterances of a loyal man, and therefore the words of a Twister, however feeble, will not be wasted on a generous and sympathetic Sparragus.’

‘By Jove, Cornelius!’ ejaculated the major, addressing himself in tones of profound admiration, ‘you’re a genius! I never should have expected such masterly tactics in one who always blundered in the field. Why, this brilliant move adds a good thousand a year to your income! And why shouldn’t you double that amount? Why not invent another pill? There’s any amount of material in the cupboard yonder. Piles upon piles of old Dimbledon’s boluses. Why not make a hotch-potch of the

lot and turn them out afresh, spick and span new; patent the pill, call it The Twister? That'll fetch 'em, I reckon! It sounds ever so much more taking than The Flinders, and will pay twice as well, no doubt. Dear, dull old D., who evidently thinks I haven't a week to live, will be rather astonished when I invite him to the wedding. Egad, I'll ask him to give Lucinda away!

The boy in buttons handed the bouquet and the letter to Mrs. Sparragus, who was getting rather tired of the daily sacrifice of flowers offered by the grateful major, but the letter gave a novelty to the stale proceeding.

'Poor man!' she meditated, hesitating to burst the seal, and scrutinising the address, 'his handwriting is very tremulous; but no wonder, considering that he has one foot in the grave. It's a pity he takes the trouble to write to thank me, but I daresay it amuses the unfortunate creature;' and the widow spread open the epistle and adjusted her spectacles.

Mrs. Sparragus spelt her way through the letter from beginning to end without in the least grasping its purport. Her first moment-

any impression was that the major was writing a story, and had sent her the first chapter for perusal.

‘Very pretty, but rather flighty. I prefer more easy reading; I’m not clever with long words, for I haven’t had so much schooling as the major. But, stay, it’s rather queer to begin a story-book in this way, and then he goes on about the pill. That’s an odd thing to begin a tale with! And then to go and put names into print—he didn’t ought to do that in a story-book; and then, farther on, he says, “Dear madam,” just like a letter—but, but—is it a letter? I do believe it is; and, now I read it through again, there’s not a doubt about it. It’s for all the world like a love-letter! Why, it is a love-letter! Good gracious! He can’t—no, he can’t mean it for me. Yet it’s addressed to me, along with the carnations he’s been sending me every day for a week. Oh, dear, oh, dear! the poor thing must be going off his head. I don’t feel quite safe. He may get dangerous, and break out at any moment; who knows? Anyhow, I won’t stay here to run any risks; I’ll go back to Tapioca Terrace this very afternoon.

I shall feel more comfortable to have about twenty miles between us.'

To reply to the epistle never entered Mrs. Sparragus's head for a moment. The only question in her mind was, whether she ought to call in Dr. Dimbledon or the police, for the poor man's own security. But then, he might be quite harmless, and it would be the ruin of Flinders to have a fuss made. No, she would slip away quietly.

And Mrs. Sparragus accordingly packed up her belongings; gave out that she had received a letter which necessitated her return to town sooner than she had intended; and so took leave. Mrs. Tierney and her daughter had already left, or she might have consulted them on the actual facts, for she held them both in great esteem. To confide in any of the hypochondriac residents was out of the question,—the major's madness might be infectious, and cheerful and salubrious Flinders might become another Colney Hatch.

But the kindly creature could not sever her acquaintance with poor Major Twister without a parting token of sympathy. She sent him

another box of the wonder-working pill by the boy in buttons, hoping it might cool him.

‘Any message, ma’am?’ inquired that mercurial youth, on receiving orders to hand the package to the major.

‘No.’

‘Then I’m not to say anything, ma’am?’

‘Say whatever you please, only give the package to Major Twister,’ answered Mrs. Sparragus, as she turned away.

The boy in buttons possessed quite as much shrewdness and love of mischief as the average of boys in buttons, and his daily commission to convey a flower from the major to Mrs. Sparragus had not been thrown away upon him, however it may have been wasted on the widow. He, moreover, realised the fact that half-crowns were not usually dispensed for nothing, and, as he had received *carte blanche* to ‘say what he pleased,’ he determined to reward the major for his bounty. He therefore repaired at once to his room, and gleefully placed the box of pills in his hands.

‘Aha!’ ejaculated the major, springing from his seat, ‘from that excellent creature?’

‘Yes, sir, with her love.’

‘Is that a fact?’ demanded Twister, almost breathless with delight.

The boy in buttons satisfied his conscience by a liberal allowance of mental reservation. He nodded his head, at the same time saying to himself, ‘Over the left,’ which is understood to qualify and render nugatory and harmless any assertion previously made.

The major chinked the silver coins in his pocket, which stimulated the boy in buttons to further confidences.

‘She looked quite ’andsome and smiled like a hangel, sir.’

The major whipped out another half-crown, and gave it to the intelligent youth, who was quite prepared to continue to do business on the same remunerative terms as long as the major pleased.

‘Of course she looked handsome,’ retorted the major, as though the adjective was not sufficiently flattering for the occasion; whereupon the boy in buttons made a tremendous plunge, which he valued at about half-a-sovereign.

‘She’d like a lock of your hair, sir!’ and he

glanced at the major's very palpable peruke which was all awry.

‘No! you don’t mean it?’

‘Yes,’ replied the mendacious youth, with the mental reservation, ‘Over the left.’

If the major hesitated to lay a lock of his ambrosial hair on the altar of affection, it was for the reason that it would not grow again; and, if he delayed to reward the boy in buttons for this superb contribution to his egoism, it was because he felt that the coins in his pocket were wholly inadequate to the occasion.

How marvellously well the young ambassador must have executed his commission to effect such results! What might not such a bright intermediary bring about? As a coadjutor, he was simply invaluable.

‘My boy!’ he said, turning to him, ‘what’s your name?’

‘Paul, sir.’

‘Paul, it’s my intention to give you promotion. Double pay, board wages, and beer money.’

‘When, sir?’

‘As soon as I come into possession of Flinders—that is to say, of Mrs. Sparragus.’

The boy in buttons was grievously disappointed. He would have preferred five shillings on the spot.

‘We shall want a butler, Paul ; I’ll make you my major-domo as a reward for—for——’

The major glanced at the boy in buttons and saw that his face was purple with suppressed laughter which, in fact, he could no longer control, and he exploded in spite of his hands forced against his jaws. The major was not so infatuated as to take leave of his reasoning faculties ; on the contrary, they had become unusually acute, and he saw at once that he was being hoaxed. He sprang to his feet, and before the boy in buttons realised the turn of events he seized him by his cravat, exclaiming between his grinding teeth :

‘Hound ! you’re humbugging me !’

The boy in buttons, terrified to death, could only gasp :

‘Please, sir, it was only in fun !’

‘Fun ! you miserable puppy ! I’ll teach you to make fun with me !’ and opening the door he

administered to the boy with his foot sufficient momentum to cause him to clear a whole flight of stairs without the customary gradation of steps and risers, displaying an amount of physical power truly phenomenal in a person so destitute of stamina as to be unequal to the effort of eating a lamb chop.

The feat accomplished, the major strode up and down his room like a caged lion at feeding-time, his *quart-d'heure* with the boy in buttons having stirred in his manly bosom a desire for fresh encounters. But the sight of the Flinders' Pill soothed the bellicose spirit within him and operated upon his better nature.

'At all events,' he meditated, grasping the box of boluses, 'there's no humbug here. There's no doubt about this substantial token. What does it symbolise? Ah! I can interpret it. Instead of sending me an unmeaning flower, she presents to me—herself! for is not the pill herself, and, indeed, the best part of herself? and this is her delicate way of confiding to me that precious commodity, and thus consenting to amalgamate the fortunes of The Twister and The Flinders-cum-Sparragus! Egad, Cornelius,

you've manœuvred well. Your tactics have been masterly. It only now remains for you to bivouac on the field of your triumphant exploit.'

Mrs. Sparragus had taken her departure an hour before the little episode of the boy in buttons, and at the station she met Dr. Dimbledon who had just alighted from a train. Salutations exchanged, the conversation turned quite naturally in the direction of Major Twister.

'Doctor,' said Mrs. Sparragus, gravely, at the same time tapping her forehead with a finger significantly, 'is he all right here?'

'Hem! between you and me, hardly. He's subject to cerebral excitement at times.'

'At all dangerous?'

'A mental twist is always unpleasant.'

'Is his likely to be so?' urged the widow, with bated breath.

'That depends upon the phase of the disorder. I should hope the major's won't take an amorous turn.'

'Would that be serious?'

'Decidedly,' replied Dr. Dimbledon, with emphasis, for he had intercepted the widow at

the station with the intention of putting her on her guard as to the gallant major.

‘I’m afraid it is rather amorous,’ said Mrs. Sparragus, with a bashful hesitancy, for she saw the absurdity of the admission she felt it right to make; ‘for, do you know, he has sent me a—a—what I can only call a love-letter.’

The doctor feigned astonishment and the utmost amusement.

‘No, really?’

‘Yes, and here’s the document:’ and the widow felt relieved in her mind the moment she had got rid of the letter, which Dr. Dimbleton perused.

‘Morbid,’ he muttered, as he folded up the epistle and slid it into his pocket.

‘Dangerous, doctor?’

‘No, it will pass off if you take no notice and send him no more pills. I’ll get Blowers to administer a double dose of tennis twice a day, which will produce a healthy reaction. But here’s your train, dear madam;’ and the doctor handed the grateful widow into her carriage.

‘There’ll be no more pills from me, you may

be sure!' she said, exultingly, as the train moved off.

'In that case, there will be no more love-letters from him,' rejoined the doctor, raising his hat; and he at once drove to the farm, and sent for Blowers.

'Blowers,' he said, with gravity, 'if you wish to maintain the character of Flinders, you and your wife must study the individualities of your boarders, and act accordingly.'

'So we do,' retorted Blowers, aggrieved.

'There's the major, for instance.'

'Yes; he's always upsetting himself, I know; but no wonder, to see him eat.'

'He'll have a fit, Blowers, unless you give him adequate exercise.'

'How am I to exercise him? He isn't a horse!'

'Work him with billiards, tennis, rackets,—anything. Give him no time to write love-letters. Work him, I say, to death, or he'll make such a fool of himself the public will begin to think you take in lunatics.'

CHAPTER IX.

A NEW ALLY.

A FEW days after the return of Mrs. Sparragus to Tapioca Terrace, that highly decorous neighbourhood was thrown into a ferment by the arrival of a carriage and pair, with footman and coachman in livery, which pulled up in front of No. 2. The phenomenon was so wholly inexplicable that No. 1 and No. 3 could only surmise that the driver had made an absurd mistake and that the brave equipage would speedily bear away. But, so far from such being the fact, the footman threw open the carriage-door and a portly gentleman emerged from it and walked with measured step up the gravel pathway to the house and knocked, handing his card to the servant.

Mrs. Sparragus was quite as much perplexed as her neighbours at a visit from a strange gentleman, and when she read the card, 'MR. ALDERMAN CLIVE,' she felt alarmed, for her idea of an alderman was a magistrate sitting in the judgment-seat at the Mansion House, uttering words of wisdom and pronouncing doom on malefactors.

'Good gracious me!' she exclaimed, as Susan handed her the card, 'what have I been guilty of? But p'raps it's a mistake. Did he ask for me?'

'Yes, mem; and he had your name quite pat. "Is Mistress Sparragus at home?" says he. "Yes," says I, wondering at his impudence. "I should like to see her, if she's not engaged," says he. Oh, mem, I hope there's nothing the matter! Is all the taxes paid?'

Mrs. Sparragus was too perplexed to satisfy Susan on this point; she felt something dreadful was going to happen, and she recollected that a tea-stalk floated in her cup at breakfast that very morning—an infallible sign that a stranger would call during the day, and, as it proved hard when placed between her teeth,

it was evident that the stranger's visit would be disagreeable.

‘Yes, mem, I came all over when I see that stranger a-floating in your tea. It always comes true! Last time you had one, you know, a man got inside this very room and presented you with a tract, and when he had bowed himself out, lo! and behold, your bottle of salts with the silver top was gone! But I was determined you shouldn't be robbed that way again, so I left this party on the door-mat.’

‘An alderman on the door-mat!’ exclaimed the widow in dismay. ‘Susan, go instantly and show him into the dining-room and beg his pardon! Do you know, he can send you to prison for contempt of court, as they call it?’

‘Lor’, mem!’ and Susan hastened to atone by showing the visitor into the dining-room, having first locked up the plate-basket; and Mrs. Sparragus, having satisfied herself before the cheval-glass that her cap was rightly adjusted, her hair smooth, her collar tasty, and her appearance in general sufficiently becoming to appear before the court, descended, making a low curtsy to the awe-inspiring alderman, just

as female defendants are wont to do to propitiate the judge when placed in the dock, with a view to mitigation of penalties.

Susan felt so anxious and doubtful as to the visitor's object that her ear and eye were alternately jammed against the key-hole. She had grave suspicions as to the stranger, and at once constituted herself her mistress's body-guard.

'Mrs. Sparragus,' said Mr. Clive, making a respectful inclination of the head, 'I hardly know how to apologise for the liberty I have taken in calling. My only excuse is, that Miss Lipperty, who, I believe, lives next door to you, is a dear friend of my daughter's; I have consequently known you for a long time by name, for she has often told us of your kind feeling towards her, and your interest in her. It is just possible she may have mentioned my daughter's name?'

'Oh, yes, Lena has often spoken of a Miss Clive,' replied Mrs. Sparragus, greatly relieved at finding that, after all, an alderman was human and could sometimes talk like other people.

'And she has also related to us the circum-

stances of your providential escape in the city some months ago. I well remember the event, for it happened close to the Mansion House, where I happened to be.'

Without intending it, Mr. Clive touched upon a topic which at once secured her confidence for it went straight to her heart.

'Ah!' she responded, wiping her eyes, 'that was indeed an escape!'

'And I have ventured to call to offer you my sincere congratulations on it.'

'And to think that the brave young man who saved me has hardly been thanked!' pursued the widow, with genuine sorrow.

'Well, that's an omission which I apprehend can easily be rectified,' suggested Mr. Clive, by way of consoling Mrs. Sparragus.

'How am I to rectify the omission, if I never see the man and never even learn his name?' she demanded, with excellent reason.

'I assumed that you had made yourself acquainted with the name of your rescuer,' replied Mr. Clive.

'I tried to, but he refused to tell me.'

'That proves him to be disinterested—a man

of the right stamp—a man one would be glad to know.’

‘Ah, what would I not give to know him !’

This speech was delivered with such an unaffected earnestness that Mr. Clive was impressed by it. A man of active sympathies, which were ever ready to take substantial form in practice, he saw at once that he might make a worthy woman happy, and his resolution was at once formed.

‘Do you know, Mrs. Sparragus, that I am almost as desirous as yourself to discover this young man ?’

‘Indeed, sir ?’ exclaimed the widow, delighted to find the alderman more and more human.

‘Yes ; we’ve got at the Mansion House a sketch-book which was picked up on the spot where your accident occurred, and we have no doubt that it belongs to the young man to whom we wish to restore it, but, as yet, he has not turned up to claim it.’

‘Poor, dear fellow. Not only is he unrewarded, but he is actually a loser by his good act !’ meditated Mrs. Sparragus, again wiping her eyes.

‘I am thinking,’ said Mr. Clive, his face brightening with the pleasure he felt at the thought, ‘that I might employ my time worse than in searching for this young man.’

‘Oh, how will you go about it?’

‘I hardly know yet; but, as I have some influence in the city, and possess, moreover, some little energy when I make up my mind to succeed, I am hopeful that, if he is to be found, I shall find him.’

Mrs. Sparragus gazed upon her interlocutor with astonishment and admiration—so far as she could without irreverence admire so august an embodiment of wisdom as an alderman.

‘And, if you really do succeed, will you let me know all about him?’ she asked, appealingly.

‘My first action shall be to bring him to you.’

Mrs. Sparragus fairly wept, and Susan, hearing her sobs, burst open the door, and advanced to her rescue.

‘Do you want me, mem?’ she enquired, casting fierce glances at Mr. Clive who, instead of quailing before her indignation, laughed merrily.

‘Susan, leave the room,’ replied Mrs. Spar-

ragus, peremptorily ; ‘when I want you I will ring the bell. I can’t teach that girl manners,’ she added, addressing Mr. Clive, ‘try all I may.’

‘She’s a little rough, but honest, no doubt, and that is a great virtue,’ replied Mr. Clive, amiably.

Susan accordingly withdrew, though with manifest reluctance, leaving the door ajar, as more convenient than the keyhole for observation. At the same moment a brilliant idea occurred to that watchful maiden. Why not summon to her assistance Mrs. Lipperty? Who so fit as that censorious lady to crush the foe of innocence and the enemy of decorum? Susan knew their severe neighbour would be taking observations from her window, and that she had but to make a sign with her finger to bring her to the rescue in an instant, and Susan did not hesitate to do what duty and inclination suggested. She thereupon opened the street door and at once discerned, as she had anticipated, an eye, bright and penetrating as that of a hawk or a cat or any other beast of prey, rivetted on No. 2. Mrs. Lipperty at once divined Susan’s summons, and, having already assumed her

black bonnet and blacker gloves, was at her side before she could repeat it. Mrs. Lipperty had not only the keen eye of the panther, but also the noiseless foot, and she reached the dining-room door swiftly, silently, and stealthily.

‘You are intimate with the lady next door?’ inquired Mr. Clive.

‘Oh, yes.’

‘And her daughter?’

‘Yes—Lena.’

‘She seems a very sweet girl,’ continued Mr. Clive, ‘and it is chiefly on her account I have presumed to call upon you.’

Mrs. Sparragus signified by her silence that she was prepared to listen. Mrs. Lipperty was equally attentive.

‘I fear Miss Lipperty is not so happy in her home as she deserves to be.’

‘Does she say she is unhappy?’ inquired Mrs. Sparragus, who had never viewed No. 1 as an unclouded Eden.

‘She is the last person to complain, but, from what I gather, her mother——’

‘Step-mother,’ corrected Mrs. Sparragus.

‘I should have said her step-mother (so

different from what a mother would be !) hardly considers her youth, her feelings, or her tastes.'

Susan began to think she had not shown a wise discretion in inviting her neighbour to participate in the proceedings when she saw the sable eavesdropper gnawing her nether lip, while her nose grew crimson with congested wrath.

'Mrs. Lipperty is—between ourselves—one of the hardest, unmercifullest woman I ever met, and Lena is to be pitied,' replied Mrs. Sparragus, in a whisper, as though she feared her voice might penetrate the nine-inch wall which separated her from No. 1. It need scarcely be added that it travelled through the opening in the door.

'Is it possible?'

'You didn't know her husband, I suppose?'

'No; I had not that honour.'

'Then you ought to thank your stars that you hadn't! Why, sir, he was about as stern a minister as ever told a congregation all about their sins—and she would make six of him!' Mrs. Sparragus made the damnatory communication, which fell like hail upon Mrs. Lipperty's

tympanum, fearfully and tragically, but at the same time with a volubility and eagerness which proved that her estimate of her friend had been long stored up, and that she was not a little thankful to have found somebody to whom she could unburden herself. 'Do you know, I attended his chapel, and one day, during his sermon, two or three of his people left, they couldn't stand his attacks, and, as they went out, he said, "There goes Mrs. Perkins, and now Toddleton is off. I suppose the cap fits them; and now, I declare, Mrs. Manns is packing up to go too. It's a pity they can't bear to hear the plain truth!" Well, Mr. Clive, between ourselves, that woman next door is just like what her husband was—only ever so much worse; he used to be whips, but she is scorpions!' Having relieved her mind of a load borne patiently for years, Mrs. Sparragus felt better, and actually laughed at the portrait she had sketched of her attached neighbour.

'Oh, my!' groaned Susan, implying thereby that she realised the tactical error she had committed, 'goodness gracious!'

But it was too late to moralise in haste; she

could only repent at leisure. She glanced at her companion eavesdropper, whose gloved hands opened and closed spasmodically, as though she were rending a victim, the tips of her cloth gloves representing talons, her nose deepening from crimson to purple.

Mr. Clive could not refrain from laughing in concert with Mrs. Sparragus at the graphic picture the latter had drawn, but it is more than probable that his hilarity would have been less pronounced had he been conscious of the proximity of the 'scorpion' in question.

'I apprehend it is no laughing matter for Miss Lena,' he said, resuming his gravity, 'a young lady of refinement and great natural gifts.'

'Ah, poor girl!'

'With a laudable ambition to accomplish herself in an elegant art.'

Mrs. Sparragus groaned:

'If it had pleased the Lord to give me such a child!'

'I was thinking that, even as it is, you might render her a most valuable service, as you are intimate with Mrs. Lipperty.'

‘Oh, how?’

‘I have no doubt your opinion would have great weight with that lady.’

Mrs. Sparragus demurred: ‘Not a bit.’

‘Nay, your kind and generous heart would reach hers.’

‘I don’t believe she’s got one!’ interposed Mrs. Sparragus, with humour.

Another storm of hailstones on the listener’s tympanum, only the hailstones were now red-hot.

‘Most of us are vulnerable somewhere,’ argued Mr. Clive. ‘Mrs. Lipperty has a weak spot.’

‘You wouldn’t think so if you heard her exhort me.’

‘May I ask the subject of her exhortations?’

‘Since my accident in the city, and the desire I have expressed to find the young man who saved me, she has never ceased warning me of the sin of changing my mind.’

‘Changing your mind!’ inquired Mr. Clive, with animation, as light seemed to be let in on an interesting question. ‘In respect of what, may I ask?’

‘Oh, my Will.’

Mr. Clive was far too delicate-minded to afford the widow the opportunity of imparting further confidences, which she seemed so ready to do; her last reply gave him matter for reflection.

‘Now my neighbour at No. 3, who helps me to manage my affairs, is far too gentlemanly to touch upon that subject.’

‘Is that Mr. Honeydew of whom I have heard Miss Lena speak?’

‘Yes. The kindest, amiablest man possible,—I don’t know what I should do without his assistance.’

‘He is a great business-man, I understand?’

‘Very great. He found some one to take Flinders off my hands, and arranged it all so nicely.’

‘That must have been very satisfactory to you.’

‘And he invested the money—three thousand five hundred pounds—for me so well that I’m getting ten per cent. for it.’

‘Ten per cent.!’ exclaimed Mr. Clive; ‘what-ever can it be placed in?’

‘Oh! something good, for he brings me the money as regular as quarter-day comes round, and won’t accept any remuneration—but, of course, I shall make him a proper return some day. He isn’t like that young and brave gentleman we want to discover, and can’t.’

Mr. Clive found in these unexpected confidences much matter for cogitation, and some moments passed before he spoke in reply.

‘Mr. Honeydew is evidently a very active, energetic person,’ he said at length, as he rose to take leave; ‘but these are matters into which I, a stranger, have no right to enter. I ventured to call in the interest of my daughter’s friend, Miss Lena; and if you can induce her step-mother to——’

‘To be more humane?’ interposed Mrs. Sparragus.

‘Well, yes, it amounts to that, I fear. You will deserve her gratitude—and that, I am convinced, you will receive.’

Mrs. Sparragus was lost in thought for some moments. At length, taking Mr. Clive’s extended hand, she replied,

‘She is a sweet girl, and I shall not forget

her. If I find that Mrs. Lipperty continues to treat the girl harshly, I shall make a codicil to my Will, and substitute Lena's name for hers.'

This delivery, given in the calm, solemn tones which bespeak resolution, fell upon the tympanum outside the door with galvanising effect; and Susan, with great presence of mind and adroitness, rattled a tray-full of crockery, to drown an ejaculation, which was not altogether benedictory, that escaped the relict of the Rev. Ebenezer, as she staggered from her coign of vantage, and made for the street-door.

As Mr. Clive crossed the threshold, he almost collided with Susan and the tray of crockery, and he caught sight of a black skirt vanishing through the doorway, in the direction of No. 1. A moment's reflection explained the phenomenon, and, as Susan showed him out, he remarked, carelessly,

'If Mrs. Lipperty had waited a little, I could have related my interview with your mistress.'

'No need for that; she heard it well enough,' replied Susan, without circumlocution.

Whereupon Mr. Clive regained his brougham, and drove away, much exercised in mind at the

facts forced upon him by Mrs. Sparragus, and the glimpses Mrs. Lipperty had afforded him of her character as well as her skirt.

Meanwhile, that exemplary lady sought her chamber in a state of irascibility quite remarkable in a person of her well-ordered demeanour. The knit brows, clenched hands, and spasmodic movement of the lips looked like swearing; but, as nothing audible escaped her, and as her aspect before the world was that of the world's censor—calm, cold, implacable—that supposition must be dismissed, and the peculiar muscular action described must be attributed to grief for the sins of her neighbours in general, and Mrs. Sparragus in particular.

‘To be called “scorpions” by the woman I’ve treated so well! To be described as unmerciful by the woman I’ve feasted with home-made jam and cranberry pies! To be made out a tyrant, because I’ve mourned in sackcloth and ashes over Leonora Jane’s hateful craze after the fiddle and the gross things of the world to which it leads; and to hear her threaten to make a codicil to the Will—the Will which, with infinite pains, I assisted her to

make—oh, the base, treacherous, false old woman ! Shall I burst in upon her, and heap upon her offending head my righteous indignation ? Shall I crush her with the weight of her misdeeds ?—Stay, would it be prudent to have words, and afford her a pretext to quit my fold ? To drive her into making that codicil ? To put a barrier between us—a gulf between No. 1 and No. 2, and perhaps throw her into the arms of No. 3 ? To tear up the Will I so carefully drew up, and cast all my expectations to the winds ? No ! it wouldn't be consistent with Christian charity. No ; I must forgive ! I must remember that the best of us err—that even I myself am fallible. Besides, there are two prowling wolves instead of one ready to rob me of my precious one, if I afford them the smallest chance. No ; I must forgive.'

Mrs. Lipperty removed her black cloth gloves, whose finger-tips suggested talons, and drew on kid, which she always wore when her intentions were pacific ; and, hastily culling a handful of parsley (having observed the delivery of a neck of mutton at No. 2), she tripped gaily from house to house, and gave a cheery rat-tat

at the door instead of the customary portentous thud, suggestive of impending doom.

‘I’ve come to see your dear mistress,’ she said, in the most gracious tone she could command, to the astonishment of Susan, who anticipated a ‘tremenjous row.’

Mrs. Sparragus, on hearing the well-known accents, though in a less acrid key, felt all the pangs of guilt. Only a few minutes ago, she had been ‘speaking her mind’ about that redoubtable person, and her unexpected advent seemed to her conscience to mean nothing less than swift retribution; and, as the spare, sable, angular figure entered the room, with the votive offering of parsley in her hand, Mrs. Sparragus closed her eyes, abashed. She would receive her chastisement with resignation.

‘My dearest Lucinda,’ said Mrs. Lipperty, gushingly, ‘you’re going to have neck of mutton,—sly thing! so I’ve brought you some garnish for it.’

Mrs. Sparragus could hardly offer her thanks, so great was her confusion.

‘I’m rather surprised that your attentive friend at No. 3 hasn’t anticipated me, for, no

doubt, he saw the joint delivered, as he takes such an interest in everything that occurs here, and parsley grows in his garden rank and weedy,' continued the amiable lady, in tones of acerbity which she endeavoured in vain to disguise by laughing; 'but unfortunately Mr. Honeydew is so very—very——'

At this moment Susan entered the room placing on the table a bottle of capers which Mr. Honeydew had sent, 'with his compliments.'

'There!' ejaculated Mrs. Lipperty, 'didn't I tell you so? Oh, how well I understand that man's motives!'

'I don't deserve the kindness you both offer me,' replied Mrs. Sparragus, sadly, without noticing the remark made by one friend at the expense of another. 'I sometimes wish you were not so good to me, for I feel I can never make a proper return!'

This observation was extremely unsatisfactory to Mrs Lipperty; it seemed to imply that she did not intend to make the proper return which had been arranged, and this was altogether at variance with her views,—a change of purpose

manifestly brought about by those designing men's visits, on some pretence or other connected with that unfortunate circumstance in Cheapside. It would, however, be highly impolitic to betray disappointment, or to appear to wish to divert Mrs. Sparragus from her purpose. Better refrain from pursuing the subject at present.

‘Have you seen that darling child of mine, lately?’ enquired Mrs Lipperty, with a view to lead up to the object of her visit.

‘Lena?’

‘Yes, bless her!’

‘She hardly ever comes near me,’ replied Mrs. Sparragus, regretfully.

‘For the reason that she has so little leisure since she took up the violin.’

Mrs. Sparragus was astonished to hear a cheerful allusion to a subject hitherto severely tabooed; and terms of endearment employed by Mrs. Lipperty with reference to her step-daughter appeared, from their novelty, quite unnatural.

‘And I’m so delighted at the progress she has made. It is truly wonderful.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes; and the dearest wish I have, so far as this world is concerned, is that she may achieve the success she deserves.’

Mrs. Sparragus could hardly believe her ears.

‘But I thought you had an objection to Lena studying the instrument?’

‘It was simply politic in me to conceal my satisfaction with a view to regulate her enthusiasm for her health’s sake, you know.’

‘I understand,’ replied Mrs. Sparragus, greatly relieved, for Alderman Clive had given her a commission to bring about this favourable state of feeling in the step-mother which she thought would prove hopeless of accomplishment, ‘and I am thankful to hear you say this,’ she added.

Mrs. Lipperty was thankful to hear her say she was thankful. She wished to satisfy her that she had misjudged her, and, if she had succeeded, the threatened codicil would never be thought of again.

‘I’m glad you approve of my method.’

‘You can’t be too indulgent to her; she

deserves all the kindness you can show her, poor child.'

'Yes, she is poor; and, as I am no better off, poor she will be all her life,' returned Mrs. Lipperty, with pathos.

'Let us hope there is better fortune and a bright future in store for her,' said Mrs. Sparragus, cheerfully.

'Ah, you are so good and generous! Had it not been for your noble, beneficent intentions, there was literally no hope—I mean, in a worldly sense, of course—for either of us.'

Mrs. Sparragus made no reply, which Mrs. Lipperty considered an unfavourable symptom. She continued:

'And, however fixed and wise and christianly your resolution may have been, evil influences are always abroad' (this was a shaft sent in the direction of Alderman Clive), 'and bad advisers are often lurking nearer home;' (this shot was sent to Mr. Honeydew's address).

'So far as I have the power, I shall avoid evil influences.'

'That is a most proper resolution, Lucinda dear.'

‘And I shall endeavour, with God’s help, to do what is right by everyone.’

‘A beautiful and pious wish!’ exclaimed Mrs. Lipperty, with gush, though she was not without misgivings; for there was a certain obscurity and ambiguity in the speech which might or might not bear a favourable interpretation.

‘Most beautiful and pious!’ she repeated, with rapt admiration, pressing together the black kid gloves which were innocent of talons, hoping that her holy enthusiasm might elicit something more clear and satisfactory, which, in fact, it did.

‘I have always considered that, when my lamented Matthew left me the Pill and the Farm, and my other lamented left me Tapioca Terrace, the little properties were only mine in trust, and that it behoved me to make such a disposition of them that, at a later day, they should fall into worthy and deserving hands.’

‘Most noble and praiseworthy!’ and the black kid gloves, destitute of talons, gave renewed demonstration of pious rapture.

‘And whenever anything happens to me—

and I pray the Almighty that I may not be unprepared——’

‘Beautiful, beautiful!’

‘My Will will be found in the right-hand top drawer of my wardrobe, underneath the French plum-box containing the grant of the grave where both my lamented lie, and where I wish also to be interred. I think it right to tell you this, just as I have informed my friend, Mr. Honeydew, so that there may be no difficulty when it does happen.’

‘How intensely touching!’

‘I only mention this because life is very uncertain, and there is no one in the house with me except Susan.’

‘But, dear Lucinda, I——’

‘Yes, you are next door, and Mr. Honeydew is also near.’

‘But I, dear Lucinda——’

‘Oh, I’m sure you would come instantly, if summoned—but there, we won’t say any more on the subject. I merely wished to make it known that I have not neglected my duty as regards the disposition of what property I have.’

I will not detain you longer; it is kind of you to give me so much of your valuable time.'

Mrs. Lipperty received her *congé* with admirable good-humour, and, kissing Mrs. Sparragus on both cheeks, she bade her adieu and returned to No. 1, far from reassured as regarded the Will and the threatened codicil.

'I don't half like her making a confidant of that man at No. 3,' she muttered, as she inserted the latch-key and opened her door; 'and then there's that new prowler who has just forced himself upon her to serve his own ends. And that's not the worst of it, for the old woman is craving to find the fellow who dragged her from under the wheels in Cheapside! I think it's a pity he didn't leave her alone!'

But this last thought was not actually embodied in words—it was only conceived.

CHAPTER X.

THE 'QUEEN OF THE GLEN.'

MR. CLIVE, citizen of London and alderman, was nothing if not practical. He was wont to admit that he was as destitute of poetry and imagination as a locomotive, but that, like a locomotive, he always went straight away to the point and invariably reached it when once his mind was made up to do so. Ample employment though he found both for head and hands during the hours consecrated to business, method and concentration of attention to the subject before him enabled him to bring it to an issue with singular promptitude, and left him sufficient leisure to take up any extraneous matter which, in fact, gave zest to his ordinary avocations, and, was, at the same time, a recreation.

The day following his visit to Mrs. Sparragus he glanced down his notes of agenda, and there found jotted down two words—‘sketch-book.’ The reminder was needless, for his interest in Mrs. Sparragus’s perilous adventure, in Lena, and in the intangible young man, was so thorough that it was not easy to dismiss it from his mind, even in the presence of business claiming attention.

The purport of the memorandum was, as we know, to trace and find the young hero of Mrs. Sparragus’s rescue, and in his official character it was quite within Mr. Clive’s province to set in motion the whole machinery of city police in the search, had he so willed. But no such idea crossed his mind. He was not a man to abuse his power for private purposes. Nor did he propose to advertise. Publicity was undesirable on every ground ; the enquiry must be quiet and personal. Mr. Clive carefully examined the sketch-book ; it was clearly the work of an accomplished artist. Unversed though he was in art-methods and mysteries, Mr. Clive saw that only a consummate expert could, with a few scratches, produce the effect of a picture,

—with a mere wash of colour the suggestion of a landscape. One sketch in particular captivated him,—an outline of a solitary birch-tree. Touched with extreme tenderness and grace, it had all the force of a finished drawing, and he at once determined to have it photographed. Surely the individuality of style would be identified by the landscape-painters? Surely the man who could do this had already made his mark? He would circulate it among the profession, informing them by letter that a sketch-book containing this among other studies remained in the hands of the authorities, who desired to restore it to the owner, requesting their advice and assistance in discovering the artist.

The circular letters, with a photographic copy, were accordingly issued by Mr. Clive to the leading artists in that particular walk; but, beyond causing visits of inspection from the profession, or notes expressive of admiration of sketches which they could ascribe to no known man, the result was failure,—a term which in Mr. Clive's vocabulary meant success delayed, and nothing more.

His next argument was, that as artists, like other people, live by their industry, and, to be able to do so, must sell their productions, this man must have business relations with those foster-mothers of art, the publishers and the dealers; and, as the leading firms were not very numerous, he employed his leisure afternoons in driving to the Agnews, the Colnaghis, the Graveses, and the Vokinse—to all the first houses in that trade, with the same negative result—success was still deferred. But smaller men, he then argued, would probably be addressed by an unknown and needy artist. So Mr. Clive sent his photograph and a letter to the smaller men, requesting to be informed whether they had any work corresponding in character to the sketch inclosed. The smaller men replied by return of post, inviting his inspection of their collections, which contained examples by the first artists in landscape, figure subjects, historical, ideal, and genre, but they could not positively ascribe the sketch which he did them the honour to enclose to anyone in particular, though they could get it

carried out in a finished painting, if desired—at a very moderate price.

The sketch was sent to Glare and Gooley among the rest of the smaller men, and Glare and Gooley did not respond like the others by return of post, for the reason that they recognised the artist's hand instantly and took time to consider the object of an inquiry which was altogether so peculiar, and, being addressed from the Mansion House, it suggested criminal proceedings. Had they purchased a stolen picture? Was it a case analagous with the missing Gainsborough? Was it a piratical reproduction of some well-known artist? For the sketch was evidently a memorandum, an impression of the 'Queen of the Glen,' which stood on the easel before them. Glare and Gooley took time to consider before replying to the letter; they might find themselves landed in a law-suit, if not a criminal trial, for the goods might not have been honestly come by. The name of Graham Aspen written upon it proved nothing. Anyone could call himself Graham Aspen. Then, again,

it might be a *bonâ fide* inquiry—everything depended upon the person making it, and Glare and Gooley glanced at the name at the foot of the letter. Richard Clive! Why, that is the alderman, one of the most respected and most solid men in the city! and Glare and Gooley exclaimed in chorus, ‘This means business,’ and answered the letter, assuring Mr. Clive that it afforded them the greatest pleasure to be able to reply in the affirmative to his inquiry—that they had, in fact, a painting by a very rising artist corresponding in every particular to the sketch enclosed, and if he would do them the honour to visit their gallery they would be proud to submit it for his inspection.

When the letter was delivered at Regent’s Park, Mr. Clive was sitting in his library listening to a duet which Lena and his daughter were playing, and his eyes being closed, the letter was laid on the table unobserved. Lena had so won a place in the respect and affection of Mr. Clive and Ethel that she was already treated as a daughter and sister, and since practising on the violin alone at Tapioca Terrace was dull work, notwithstanding Mrs. Lipperty’s new-born

zeal in her behalf, she could not refuse the welcome offered her by Mr. Clive, who had a room fitted up for her adjoining Ethel's, and bade her consider his daughter's home her home whenever she could be spared by Mrs. Lipperty. Ethel was particularly gentle and loving on the present occasion, for it was the eve of Lena's birthday, and, with girls of their age, birthdays are grave events demanding solemn observance.

'To-morrow, ah, Lena, to-morrow will be a great day!' said Mr. Clive, gently rallying the young girl, who appeared a little absent.

Lena had nothing to say, and only blushed.

'Ethel, how are you going to celebrate the day?' he enquired, turning to his daughter.

'Practising, papa!' replied Ethel, joyously.

'What! grinding for the pleasure of the thing?' urged Mr. Clive, with amusement.

'Yes; we have both made up our minds to grind and grind till we can play that sonata of Beethoven's which you are so fond of, papa, as it ought to be played.'

'Is it so, Lena?' he asked.

'Yes, Mr. Clive; it is the only return I can make for all your kindness to me.'

‘Nay, my child,’ answered Mr. Clive, taking Lena’s hand, ‘the debt of gratitude is with me, for you have made Ethel happier than she ever was before,—and you have made Ethel’s father feel that he has two daughters instead of one,’ added Mr. Clive, not without emotion.

Ethel and Lena were not less moved, for Mr. Clive never spoke idly, and Ethel kissed him with tears in her eyes. She then embraced Lena, saying,

‘What are you thinking about, dear, you’re a wee bit dull?’

‘I was only thinking of what your good father has been doing to make Mrs. Sparragus happy, and all to no purpose. It is so disappointing to him.’

‘When you know papa better, Lena, you will understand that disappointment only seems to stimulate him. He doesn’t admit failure until he sees that Providence is distinctly against him—then he bows in submission. He is most anxious to succeed for three reasons. One is, to gratify the laudable curiosity of good Mrs. Sparragus; the second is, to restore the sketch-

book to the rightful owner. Can you guess the third reason, Lena?’

Lena could not guess the third reason.

‘It is his desire to gratify—his daughter’s beloved friend.’

Lena neither admitted nor denied that she had such a wish, which was proof sufficient that her friends had divined correctly. Suddenly the two girls were startled by an exclamation from the other end of the room where Mr. Clive was reading a letter which he had found lying before him.

‘On the track at last!’ shouted Mr. Clive, starting to his feet. ‘Hurrah!’

The girls could only surmise that some city defaulter—a fraudulent trader, a peculating clerk had been run to earth, and they were half disposed to pity the unhappy wretch.

‘What has the unfortunate creature been doing, papa?’ inquired Ethel, almost rebuking her father’s merciless exultation.

‘The unfortunate creature who rescued Mrs. Sparragus from certain death is within reach, that’s all, Ethel,’ replied Mr. Clive, with hilarity,

at the same time displaying the letter, which the girls sprang forward to read.

Messieurs Glare and Gooley never penned an epistle which created more breathless anxiety. It was read and re-read in the deepest silence, though Mr. Clive was not so absorbed in it that he failed to notice Lena's face, which was suddenly overspread with a flush, and to hear a spasmodic inspiration of the breath which betrayed deep feeling.

‘Oh, papa, let us go to these people at once!’ implored Ethel, clapping her hands. ‘May I order the carriage?’

‘We will go to-morrow,’ replied Mr. Clive.

‘Why to-morrow?’ Ethel demanded, in tones of disappointment.

‘Did I not tell Lena just now that to-morrow will be a great day? Let me have credit for being a bit of a prophet, and wait to see what it brings forth.’

The violins were laid aside, reading was neglected, conversation ceased, for the father and the daughter and the daughter's friend were busied with speculations according to their respective bents. Ethel hoped the unknown

artist might be found, for Lena seemed to wish it. Lena hoped he might be discovered because it would make Mrs. Sparragus happy. Mr. Clive desired it, because, should he succeed in his endeavour to trace the young man, he would have the satisfaction of restoring to him his own, clearing up a small mystery, assisting Mrs. Sparragus in a laudable wish, and—pleasing Lena.

When Lena returned to Tapioca Terrace she was surprised to see Mrs. Lipperty emerge from No. 3, the abode of Mr. Honeydew, who bowed her out with every demonstration of esteem. The circumstance as between neighbours would in an ordinary way be not only natural but highly probable, relations more or less friendly usually existing between near residents in suburban districts. But we have seen that No. 1 and No. 3 Tapioca Terrace mistrusted one another in respect of the good lady at No. 2 to a degree verging on actual detestation, the consequence being that they never exchanged recognitions, and never failed to use every opportunity to damage one another in the opinion of the confiding and simple Mrs. Sparragus. The

feud had often caused Lena both shame and sorrow, so absolutely incapable was she of understanding either prejudice, suspicion, or greed. It was, therefore, with astonishment and not with displeasure that she witnessed the unusual spectacle.

‘Dear mamma,’ she exclaimed, cheerfully, ‘you’ve been to pay Mr. Honeydew a visit, I’m glad to see.’

‘Yes; I had occasion to do so.’

‘About anything particular?’ inquired Lena, interested.

‘I don’t feel at all bound to explain everything to you, Leonora Jane,’ curtly replied Mrs. Lipperty, thus terminating the dialogue, at the same time jotting down sundry notes, which she evidently feared might escape her memory.

‘Where is Thistle Grove?’ she suddenly inquired, reading her notes and turning to her step-daughter.

‘Thistle Grove,’ repeated Lena, taxing her memory. ‘I really don’t know; but I suppose it can be easily found.’

‘Of course.’

Certain information communicated over the

garden-wall by the faithful Susan to Mrs. Lipperty as to the result of the interview between her mistress and the young man, and subsequently with Mr. Clive, had greatly exercised that censorious lady, for she saw at once that the unfortunate circumstance which brought about Mrs. Sparragus's rescue had impregnated that good lady's mind with new ideas and fresh interests, to the danger of the interests and ideas antecedent to that deplorable event ; and, from all that could be learned, these novel notions were hugged with extraordinary tenacity and threatened to have consequences highly reprehensible, and therefore unsatisfactory to Mrs. Lipperty, who thus argued the question :

‘That young man had, somehow or another, so infatuated the old woman that she'll never rest till she has found out who he is, and made him her heir. There wasn't much danger, so long as she only raved about it, but that man Clive declared he meant to discover him, and no doubt he knows how to set about it. I used to think Honeydew a danger—for he is clever and unscrupulous—but the old woman's eyes could easily be opened wide enough to see

through him ; and I can manage that at any time. Now, I wonder what Honeydew's views are about this business? Perhaps it would be prudent to bury the hatchet for the moment, and seek his advice in presence of a common enemy,—for I know well enough Honeydew is after her money—that's as clear as noonday. Yes, I'll confer with him,—there's no one else I can consult in so delicate a matter. Lena—wretched, obstinate simpleton—would be worse than useless. I'll go to No. 3.'

Whereupon, the relict of the Rev. Ebenezer, well aware that her detested rival, Honeydew, was at home,—for the outgoings and returnings of her neighbours were the subject of daily observation—attired herself, and presently rang the bell at No. 3.

'Does Mr. Honeydew happen to be at home?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'Would you ask him if——'

'Pray step in, Mrs. Lipperty; happy to see you,' said the gentleman himself, appearing at the door.

'Oh, thank you so much ;' and Mrs. Lipperty

entered, Mr. Honeydew showing her into his sanctum.

‘I’ve called,’ began Mrs. Lipperty, confidentially, ‘about our dear friend next door.’

‘Ah, yes; about that narrow escape. Wonderful, wasn’t it?’

‘Miraculous—and serious.’

‘Very.’

‘The poor dear has seemed so changed ever since that, knowing the warmth of your regard and your disinterested friendship for her, I thought I might ask your opinion.’

‘In respect of what, pray?’

‘The dear soul seems so unsettled about her—her affairs,’ stammered Mrs. Lipperty, feeling a little doubtful, after all, as to Mr. Honeydew’s cordiality.

‘Her affairs!’

Mr. Honeydew opened his ears and eyes very wide indeed, because he had been managing her financial matters to Mrs. Sparragus’s entire satisfaction for a considerable time.

‘I know it will be best for me to be very plain and straight-forward in anything I have

to say about our dear friend. You would wish it?’

‘Most decidedly,’ replied Mr. Honeydew, with perfect sincerity.

‘She is for ever talking about the young man who, so providentially, saved her from certain death. She is determined to find him.’

‘Let her do so, by all means.’

‘But he may be one of those worldly-minded, unregenerate people who are always seeking whom they may devour.’

‘I hardly think so.’

‘I’m rejoiced to hear you say that. You have, no doubt, good reasons for so favourable an opinion?’

‘I judge by the style of the man and his abode.’

‘Ah, you have seen him?’

‘Yes; I saw him when he brought the old lady home.’

‘But, as to his abode?’

‘I followed him thither, feeling just a little bit curious—as, probably, you also were—as to who and what he was.’

‘You actually followed him home! How

very judicious ! I really must compliment you. And, pray, where does the man live ?

‘In Thistle Grove.’ Mr. Honeydew hesitated a moment before giving the information, but he did not see that it could be of any use to Mrs. Lipperty, and, moreover, it would prove to her that candour was his weak point. ‘No. 9.’

‘Indeed ! And his name ?’

‘Well, that wasn’t so easy to get hold of. I couldn’t ask him the question point-blank, so I tried the neighbouring tradespeople. It was no use going to the tailor’s, for evidently he was not wastefully extravagant in the article of clothing ; so I tried the beer-shop. They had no such customer. I then purchased a cigar at the tobacconist’s, and asked them the name of the young man at No. 9. They didn’t know ; therefore, I suppose he doesn’t smoke. So I dropped in at the baker’s. Yes, a young man at No. 9 did casually purchase a loaf there. He was said to be an artist named Aspen.’

‘How amusing !’ exclaimed Mrs. Lipperty, clapping her hands.

‘Rather a shaky name, eh ?’ inquired Mr. Honeydew, with a laugh ; and Mrs. Lipperty

thought the notion still more amusing. 'A very appropriate name for a shaky person.'

'Now you know as much as I do about the young man,' added Mr. Honeydew, with his characteristic candour, wondering meanwhile what Mrs. Lipperty would do with the information.

'Many, many thanks! I must confess I felt a leetle bit curious—but nothing beyond that, I assure you.'

'Oh, I'm perfectly satisfied of that,' promptly replied Mr. Honeydew, who said to himself, 'I see what your little game is.'

'What would not our dear Mrs. Sparragus give for the information!' speculated Mrs. Lipperty, confidentially.

'Then by all means tell her,' rejoined Mr. Honeydew, with airy frankness, his prevailing weakness getting the better of his judgment, as usual.

'Tell her! Why, she'd make a Will to-morrow in his favour.'

'And why should she not? If she thinks she can't do better with her money, let her leave it to him, if she fancies him.'

‘But there are older friends, nearer and dearer, remember—yourself, for instance,’ remonstrated the astonished Mrs. Lipperty, dwelling with tender delicacy upon the latter’s words.

Mr. Honeydew burst out laughing :

‘Oh, as to that, I know what her intentions at present are.’

‘Really !’

‘All I am to have is the cuckoo-clock and a plated soup-ladle. And I shall be perfectly satisfied.’

‘And all the rest——?’

‘Goes to a dear friend residing not a hundred miles from No. 2 ; but a sense of delicacy forbids my communicating the name of the fortunate lady to Mrs. Lipperty.’

Mrs. Lipperty gave every evidence of amazement at the facts confided to her by the too candid financier, though, having herself drawn up the Will, the information was not such news as it appeared to be. She wiped her eyes, and Mr. Honeydew thrust his tongue into his cheek.

‘But, if her curiosity as to the young man should be gratified, she’d go and upset all this

righteous distribution of property,' argued the relict of the Rev. Ebenezer.

'No doubt she will. Nothing else will cure her desire to ferret out this young man. But, that deed accomplished, she'll trouble herself no more about him, and in six months she'll put the Will behind the fire and make a fresh one, and I shall get the cuckoo-clock again, and the dear friend not a hundred miles off will get her lion's share just as before.'

'Oh, dear, how beautifully you put it!'

'Making Wills is the last infirmity of some noble minds, you know, and if you discourage or attempt to thwart them, why—so much the worse for you ;' and Mr. Honeydew laughed so robustly that Mrs. Lipperty thought him the nicest man she had ever seen, but far, far too candid. Thereupon she rose and graciously took leave of Mr. Honeydew, who escorted her to the door, and returned, greatly re-assured, to No. 1, but entirely dissenting from Mr. Honeydew's views as to the policy of enlightening Mrs. Sparragus at present.

The following day was Lena's birthday, but the event was not marked by any features to

distinguish it. No bouquet, no deliciously mysterious package, no gratulatory card lay on Lena's cover at breakfast to surprise and delight her. Mrs. Lipperty was far too sensible to indulge in folly of that kind. The only circumstance to signalise the occasion was a return to her normal habit of animadversion and a homily across the table more mordant, if possible, than usual, as became the relict of the Rev. Ebenezer.

‘Eighteen! Well, I hope, Leonora Jane, that the next eighteen years will be employed more profitably than the last.’

‘I hope so too, mamma.’

‘For I can assure you that, until the old Adam is thoroughly purged out of us, the best of us are but filthy rags.’

‘I know it too well, mamma.’

‘Yes, no doubt you know it—you can't pretend you don't, Leonora Jane, for I have felt it my duty to follow the noble example of your lamented father, and remind you that your inward part is very wickedness;—it's no use sighing, Leonora Jane, it sounds so like hypocrisy, when one knows that you are all the

time imagining mischief in your heart and walking after vanity.'

Lena had nothing to say in self-defence, she supposed she was only receiving her deserts, so she submitted meekly and almost gratefully to the flagellation appropriate to the momentous event of her anniversary.

But, alas! her worldly-mindedness returned when the appointed hour arrived for her appearance at Regent's Park, and all the consciousness of a reprobate heart vanished into thin air the moment she found herself in the brougham with Mr. Clive and Ethel, bound for the art-gallery belonging to Glare and Gooley.

Those gentlemen did not fail to be at their posts, and were, in fact, awaiting the visit of the well-known alderman with more than ordinary interest, for they scented business and arranged their prints and canvases in the most alluring order. All the gems of their collection were placed on view, the only exception being the 'Queen of the Glen.' As they gave the finishing touch to their gallery, the carriage drove up, and, almost before it came to a standstill, Mr. Clive and the young ladies sprang out and

entered the shop. Casting a rapid glance through the contents, the visitors uttered exclamations of disappointment,—they had anticipated finding a picture corresponding to the sketch, and not one in all the choice examples of old and modern masters arrayed before them held their interested attention for a moment.

‘Not here,’ said Mr. Clive, sorrowfully, ‘we might have saved ourselves the pains of coming.’

‘Permit me, Alderman Clive, to show you something in our cabinet;’ and, so saying, Mr. Glare led the way through a rich portière into an inner chamber, and the visitors, entering somewhat perfunctorily, stood astonished before an easel supporting the ‘Queen of the Glen.’

Long and in silence they gazed on the lovely painting whose beauty was enhanced by rich draperies, and a soft light which seemed co-existent with the atmosphere in the picture. There indeed was the perfected idea noted with such delicate tenderness in the sketch. The graceful birch-tree stood in its natural beauty apart from its congeners which seemed to keep

at a respectful distance, and yet in attendance, and apparently inclining in the direction of the favoured tree. The visitors felt that a touch of humanity pervaded the work,—the lonely tree seemed to feel the burden of solitude, and Lena was the first to break the silence, saying, in a whisper to Ethel,

‘It reminds me of one who pines for a companion;’ and she pressed Ethel’s arm, for the tree symbolised her own great need of other days.

‘Is it for sale?’ enquired Mr. Clive, turning to the dealer, who replied in the affirmative. ‘I will take it,’ said the alderman; ‘let me have it to-day.’

‘I will dispatch it at once, sir.’

‘What have I to pay for it?’ asked Mr. Clive, opening his cheque-book, and taking up a pen.

‘Fifty guineas.’

And Mr. Clive drew a cheque for that amount.

‘Papa,’ exclaimed Ethel, gleefully, ‘we have found the artist’s name in the corner of the picture.’

‘Ah! what is it?’

‘Graham Aspen,’ interposed Glare, handing a receipt to Mr. Clive; ‘a most promising artist, destined, undoubtedly, to take high rank among our landscape-painters.’

‘What is his address? I should be glad to pay him a visit.’

Messieurs Glare and Gooley exchanged glances. It was not at all consistent with the interests of their business to bring patron and artist into personal contact; they preferred that all transactions should be effected through them. In fact, they viewed Aspen as a discovery, the monopoly of which belonged to them.

‘Unfortunately he didn’t leave his address with us; but we commissioned a companion picture, and we expect him to bring it any day.’

‘Give me the refusal of it; and above all things let me have his address.’

So saying, the party re-entered the carriage and drove away.

‘I am disappointed in one respect,’ said Mr. Clive, as they journeyed along, exulting in the success of their expedition; ‘I foretold that Lena’s birthday was going to be a great day,

but it would have been a greater day if we could have discovered our hero's address as well as his name.'

Strangely enough at that moment Mrs. Lipperty's question recurred to Lena's memory : 'Where is Thistle Grove?' and involuntarily, almost unconsciously, she repeated aloud the words : 'Where is Thistle Grove?'

Mr. Clive was considerably surprised at an inquiry which seemed made in response to his allusion to his hero's address.

'Ha! Does he live at Thistle Grove?'

Lena hastened to explain away the words which had escaped her.

'Well, it is singular, but I happen to know that Thistle Grove is a favourite resort of artists;' and he pulled the check-string, whereupon the carriage was drawn up and the footman descended. 'Tell Stevens to drive to Thistle Grove.'

'Papa!' exclaimed Ethel, in wonderment, 'whatever are you going to Thistle Grove for?'

'I am just a bit superstitious, my dear, and there may be something in Mrs. Lipperty's innocent question. At all events, it will do

no harm to extend our drive, even if my character for common-sense should suffer.'

The carriage drew up at the corner of the street. The footman descended and inquired the number of the house at which his master desired to stop.

'This will do ;' and Mr. Clive got out. Reconnoitering the neighbourhood for a likely place to make inquiries, he pitched upon the one particular house where information could be obtained—namely, the baker's.

'Can you tell me whether a Mr. Aspen lives in the Grove ?'

'Yes, sir, at No. 9.'

'An artist, is he not ?'

'Yes, an artist, so I am told.'

'Thank you ;' and Mr. Clive, making a note of the address, returned to the carriage.

'Well, dear papa,' said Ethel, in accents of playful derision, 'has your character for common sense suffered or not ?'

'You shall judge for yourself some day.'

'What do you mean by that, papa ?'

'I mean that this is a far greater day than I promised Lena it should be.'

Mr. Clive thought it prudent not to divulge what he had learnt at the baker's until later, and his daughter interpreted his silence as failure.

On arriving home he found the picture in the library, delivered with Messieurs Glare and Gooley's respectful thanks. Rejoining his daughter in the saloon, he inquired what birthday gift she had prepared for Lena, and Ethel showed him a diamond ring which she proposed to offer her.

'She is not a girl that cares for jewellery. That will not do.'

'Then what am I to give the dear girl?' asked Ethel, disappointed.

'Leave it with me to select something.'

'But there is so little time to think about it, papa.'

'Time enough, my child. Where is Lena?'

'In the garden.'

'Go and join her.'

Ethel found her friend busily culling flowers, and she at once co-operated with her in an employment which is always provocative of interest, for the judicious arrangement of colour and form

in the composition of a nosegay is no mean test of taste, and women almost invariably succeed in this delicate occupation.

When the task was accomplished, Ethel enquired the purpose for which Lena destined the beautiful and fragrant bouquet.

‘I wish to place it in your father’s room,’ she replied, in her quiet way.

‘Why?’ enquired Ethel, amused.

‘Because he loves flowers, and, as this is my birthday, I thought I might be allowed the privilege of doing something in token of my grateful attachment to him.’

When, half-an-hour later, Lena sought her room she was overcome by an object which met her gaze. Hanging against the wall was the ‘Queen of the Glen,’ to which was attached a card inscribed thus:

‘To my valued friend Lena, in token of my affection and respect.

‘ETHEL CLIVE.’

CHAPTER XI.

MISGIVINGS.

HER sojourn at Flinders had effected a great deal for Mrs. Tierney, and its reputation for salubrity appeared justified; for the lady, delicate in frame as in constitution, had returned home in unusual health, and amongst the earliest visits of congratulation paid was one from her friend and medical adviser, Dr. Eustace, who had sent her thither and who was sincerely gratified at the result.

‘Doctor,’ said Mrs. Tierney, grasping his hand, ‘I am deeply indebted to you for this recovery, for I ascribe it to your judicious treatment.’

‘Ah, my dear madam,’ he replied, gravely, ‘when a patient speaks in those terms I feel

humbled, for I know how little I have really had to do with the return to health.'

'But you sent me to Flinders,' she rejoined, as if that fact was conclusive and proved her point.

'Yes; because I knew that mother Nature might there do for you that which the College of Physicians and Apothecaries' Hall combined would not effect here. Besides,' he added, pointing to Hester, who was sitting by her mother and watching every movement with the utmost interest, 'next to Nature your burden of debt lies here. We doctors too often get credit which is due to the undemonstrative nurse.'

'I feel I have done almost nothing,' earnestly disputed Hester; 'there is so little I can do.'

'Dear child,' replied Mrs. Tierney, drawing her daughter closer to her, 'she has indeed been a devoted little nurse.'

'Say dutiful, mamma; I have only done my duty,' remonstrated Hester, burying her face in her mother's bosom.

'It is pure devotion,' insisted Mrs Tierney.

Hester shook her head.

'Which is the right word, doctor, duty or

devotion? You shall decide between us,' said Mrs. Tierney, with vivacity.

'Devotion, as between parent and child, is a natural instinct. Duty is a moral grace. The seat of devotion is the heart. Duty springs from the mind. If I am asked to diagnose the case before me,' continued the physician, humour playing about his benign face, 'I should say that duty and devotion go hand in hand, and filial love, the purest of human passions, sanctifies both. Equally happy should the giver and receiver be in such a conjunction!'

Mrs Tierney pronounced the referee's judgment as wise as it was flattering. The doctor continued :

'I know Miss Tierney has nursed you well. I see the result in you and the capacity in her.'

'Ah, yes, it is indeed so.'

'Allow me to moralise and add that there is not a surer evidence of natural grace and cultured mind than that gentle care for the sick which our women manifest, and which is one of the finest features of our time. We doctors see it, and rejoice to see it.'

‘Everything you say is true,’ responded Mrs. Tierney, with enthusiasm; ‘and you seem to be able to read our thoughts. This dear child has so often said she is never so happy as when nursing the sick; if it be only a bird or a kitten, she seems in her element.’

‘I quite believe it, for it is just what I should have expected. In Miss Hester’s character I see self-sacrifice, self-denial, patience, courage, and, above all, piety. These are qualities which plead for exercise, and where is there such a field for their exercise as in ministering to the sick?’

Hester looked very grave, but her features were irradiated by a fervour which proved the depth of her feelings.

‘I cannot admit or lay claim to all the kind and generous things you say,’ she replied, ‘but mamma has told you the direction in which my tastes lie, and I feel I should be very happy if I might be allowed to employ myself in some useful way among the sick poor.’

Turning to Mrs. Tierney, Dr. Eustace continued:

‘You know, dear madam, that we physicians

train ourselves to study our patients, and to read much that is invisible to other eyes. I have of course seen the affectionate care and anxiety your child has evinced for you in your hour of weakness and pain ; the indefatigable and almost maternal tenderness, the forethought and the firmness shown under trying circumstances.'

‘ Yes ; and at all hours !’

‘ And, if I understand character at all, I should say that to alleviate human suffering and sorrow, by the pious offices which a true woman views as her highest privilege, would be to your daughter the crowning joy of your life.’

Hester was too moved to speak. A deep breath drawn was her only rejoinder, but it implied acquiescence.

‘ Dear doctor,’ interposed Mrs. Tierney, as the difficulties of the situation flashed across her mind, ‘ though I admit the truth of all you say, and rejoice to confirm your estimate of this precious child, I hardly think she feels her vocation lies seriously in that direction, though she would do her best when cases came in her way, no doubt. Is it as I suppose, darling ?’

‘I should like to give myself to it entirely,’ replied Hester, softly.

‘What,—as a profession?’

‘Yes, dear mamma.’

Mrs. Tierney’s eyes filled with tears as she contemplated her daughter’s earnest face, and at the same time conjured up the weightiest objections to the project.

‘My darling, you don’t know what you are proposing to undertake.’

‘Yes, dear mamma, I have been thinking about it for a long time.’

‘But the risks!’

‘What risks, dear?’

‘Ask Dr. Eustace to enlighten you.’

The kindly physician turned to Hester.

‘My dear girl,’ he said, taking a seat opposite her, ‘I should not be your friend if I did not point out both the pros and the cons in this business, especially when the latter are said to preponderate.’

‘I should wish to know the worst, Dr. Eustace.’

‘To begin with, there is always the danger of infection.’

‘Yes, but how very rarely do you hear of either doctor or nurse taking infection,’ argued Hester.

‘It is true ; but still the danger exists. Then there is the saddening spectacle of human anguish, besides many things from which the tender heart recoils, and which you cannot even have imagined. These should deter you, Miss Tierney.’

‘They do not and would not deter me, because I should nerve myself to bear them.’

‘Then there would be the prejudice to your own health ; the loss of rest ; the burden of other people’s domestic sorrows ;—these things should make a young lady pause and shrink from such a calling.’

‘I have considered all this, Dr. Eustace, and I do not shrink, much less hesitate. These are the “cons.” Please tell dear mamma the “pros,”’ continued Hester, earnestly ; ‘she needs to be cheered.’

‘Now then for the “pros ;” the result of my experience is, that the gains outweigh the cost,’ said the physician, encouragingly.

‘Yes, yes,’ exclaimed Hester, with every

manifestation of delight, 'I have come to that conclusion.'

'Few joys exceed those we feel in mitigating the sufferings of others; of faithfully discharging the common duties of humanity; of winning back the hue of health to the pallid cheek; of listening to the first few simple words that well up from the grateful heart; to be watched for lovingly and anxiously, and to go one's way bearing the precious burden of an approving conscience;—these are the rewards that outweigh the pains a hundred times over.'

Hester turned a radiant face to her mother who had long been silent and said,

'These are the rewards, dear mamma; may I not have them?'

Mrs. Tierney felt too moved to answer. She signified by a glance at Dr. Eustace that she assigned the decision to him.

'Your daughter,' he began, speaking with the seriousness the case demanded, 'is not, with all her earnestness, an enthusiast merely,—had she been so I should have done my utmost to dissuade her from entertaining this idea,—but she is a calm and capable thinker, who has

reasoned out a noble conception and arrived at a sound conclusion, as I should have expected. The dangers I pointed out had no deterrent effect ; the possible risks of infection and even of death had no terrors for her. I therefore say, without hesitation or misgiving, that she is marked out by nature for the noble calling to which she aspires, and I think, dear madam, you should not withhold your consent.'

It was an ordeal both for mother and child ; both were impressed with the gravity of the situation, and at length Hester broke the silence :

'If you disapprove, darling, I will try to think no more about it.'

'I wish it, my precious child. Go, and may the Father of us all protect you !' and Mrs Tierney burst into tears.

Dr. Eustace saw that it rested with him to conjure away the doubts and apprehensions which evidently afflicted Mrs. Tierney.

'Your daughter shall be exposed to no needless trials, toils or dangers. Intentionally I dwelt upon them with emphasis by way of crucial test. But she can do this beneficent

service in the fullest sense without all the perils I suggested. Confer together, ponder it well, and, if you agree that it shall be undertaken, I will place her under Mrs. Beaver, a skilled and very judicious nurse, who will be another mother to her, and, associated with her, she shall have the opportunity of administering consolation and comfort to those in need of them, and exercising her healing powers on the suffering. Leave it to me.'

Thereupon Dr. Eustace withdrew.

It was an issue of moment in Hester's life and her mother recognised it as such. But she was both a true woman and a good mother, and, while pointing out the many objections and difficulties, she nevertheless dwelt with admiration on the nobleness and honourableness of the calling, and, giving her the benefit of her wise and matured discretion, left her absolutely mistress of her actions. And if there was a moment's hesitancy in Hester's mind it was on account of her mother. Would she be justified in leaving her? This doubt her mother instantly dismissed. Thanks to Hester's good nursing and the fine air of Flinders, she was now in

excellent health ; she could safely be left. In the course of a few days, Hester wrote to Dr. Eustace in these terms :

‘ If I have delayed writing on the subject of our discussion it has not been in consequence of any change of purpose on my part, and if I have felt any hesitancy it has been from a fear of my falling short of the high estimate you, in your goodness, have formed of me. But, even with this drawback, I am ready to serve those to whom I may be useful, and dear mamma not only permits but encourages me to place myself in your hands.’

Dr. Eustace lost no time in bringing Hester and Mrs. Beaver into association, and the young novice went into training in one of those excellent institutions for gentlewomen which Dr. Eustace visited professionally.

Hester speedily won the respect of the inmates by her thoughtful care, deft service and cheerful manner, while her sympathetic interest in her patients’ affairs secured for her their genuine affection.

Mrs. Tierney, who watched her child with

great solicitude, saw by her bright demeanour, chastened though it was by the constant spectacle of human suffering, that she had not mistaken her vocation, and, when Dr. Eustace next visited her, she gave full expression to her satisfaction.

‘Do you know,’ she said, ‘the dear girl doesn’t in the least fulfil the promise of her early childhood.’

‘I recollect she used to be frolicsome as a young girl.’

‘Say frivolous, rather! I may say mischievous.’

‘It was the pretty mischief of a kitten,’ interposed the physician; ‘a sign of health and strength and good digestion.’

‘But the playful kitten changed into the demure cat so suddenly,’ she remarked.

‘Was the transformation so very sudden?’ inquired Dr. Eustace, amused.

‘Indeed it was. I may say it took place in a day—in an hour, even; almost in a moment!’ responded Mrs. Tierney, in the confidential tones of one who imparts a secret.

‘How, pray?’

‘You remember that startling incident when I visited you some months ago?’

‘When the young artist swooned?’

‘Yes. I date the change from that day.’

Dr. Eustace recalled all the incidents; the sympathy the young girl evinced for the sufferer, her solicitude for his restoration in subsequent conversations, and her animation whenever reference was made to him.

‘My dear madam,’ he said, ‘if it was as you suppose, and the beautiful traits in your daughter’s character were really called into activity by that accidental circumstance, it is only another proof that trifles are often fruitful of great issues. That moment may have decided your child’s future. It gave a direction, sharp and sudden, to her mind, turning it into a channel fraught with great benefit to others and happiness to herself. Therefore let us be thankful that it was as it was.’

‘Yes, I am indeed thankful. Still,’ continued Mrs. Tierney, with some anxiety, after a moment’s pause, ‘you will not, I am sure, doctor, allow the dear girl to sacrifice her precious

health in this praiseworthy employment, which has now lasted some months.'

'I am too selfish to sacrifice the nurse for the sake of the patient,—I value them too highly for that; and you have only anticipated me, Mrs. Tierney, on a point I was intending to touch upon.'

Mrs. Tierney expressed her satisfaction at this statement.

'The nurse is the doctor's right hand. They see with his eyes, and lead the patient with infinite care along the tedious road to recovery to which the physician only points the way. I have watched your dear child with no slight anxiety, for I have seen how absolutely she surrenders herself to the cause she has espoused, and how completely she forgets herself in the discharge of her pious duties. The natural result follows. Her physical resources are drawn upon largely, and her reserve of strength is not what I should desire to see. Notwithstanding her buoyancy of spirits and her bravery, she flags, unconsciously to herself, but palpably to me. I propose, therefore, to give her a few

weeks' vacation. Take her away. Give her rest and pure air.'

Mrs. Tierney was rejoiced at the suggestion, and lost no time in arranging to give effect to it, for Dr. Eustace's opinion was confirmatory of her own apprehensions; she had observed the lassitude which Hester betrayed after her day's labours, and her evenings were too frequently passed in involuntary repose. Especially noticeable was the fact that, whereas hitherto she was wont to entertain and delight her mother and friends with song after song, endowed as she was with a voice of singular beauty, she now declared herself unequal to the effort, and was consequently neither invited nor encouraged to sing.

Dr. Eustace's parting words were :

'I would not have you let her imagine that you are anxious and apprehensive. It might bring about the evil you dread. You need a change yourself ; she will accompany you necessarily. And, whithersoever you go, let her pursue her beneficent inclinations. You are too wise to thwart a tendency which has developed into a holy passion. Every cottage, every cabin

will be a field for her ministrations ; for sorrow and suffering are to be found everywhere.'

Dr. Eustace then took leave of Mrs. Tierney. He had received an urgent summons from Alderman Clive.

The worthy alderman made it a rule to do nothing in a hurry ; and this was in a great measure the secret of his successes,—he considered well, made up his mind, and then went straight to his goal, as has been already stated. Many men, probably most men, finding themselves on the trail of a man with whom they desired to have personal intercourse, would have followed the scent at once, and have sought the desired interview there and then ; but Mr. Clive was for the moment content,—he had discovered the young artist's abode, surely that was sufficient success for the day. To-morrow he would visit him alone, and afford himself the pleasure of making the acquaintance of the gifted author of the 'Queen of the Glen,' and commission a companion picture. His business in the city concluded, he drove to Brompton, and, dismissing his carriage, he made his way on foot to Thistle Grove. Reaching No. 9, he

rang the bell, which was answered by a little girl.

‘Does Mr. Aspen live here?’ he inquired.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Can I see him?’

‘Please go upstairs to his room.’

‘Which is his room?’

‘The first door on the landing, sir.’

Mr. Clive, as he ascended the stairs, was struck with the modesty of the dwelling, which seemed hardly in keeping with the genius which was so palpable in the painting.

‘How often it happens,’ he meditated, ‘that the most gifted men enjoy little and covet less the good things of life! Art must indeed be its own reward. This young painter, for a paltry fifty pounds, parts with a work which will be a delight to generations, and deems himself paid. No sordid ambition his! no rapacity for lucre here! Such facts should be a forcible lesson to us men of ease and plenty!’

These reflections occupied his mind as he mounted the stairs with a soft and almost timorous foot and reached the door, when he knocked with his gloved hand. Noiselessly and

gently the door was opened, and a pale and anxious face appeared. It was Jem.

Jem interrogated the visitor by a glance; he spoke no word.

‘I have called to see Mr. Aspen, if he is not too much engaged,’ said the alderman.

‘Hush!’ exclaimed the youth, in a hoarse whisper. ‘Hush! he is asleep, I am thankful to say;’ and Jem laid a finger on his lips, while tears rolled down his pallid cheeks.

‘Is he ill?’ demanded Mr. Clive, alarmed at the appearance of the young man.

‘Ill!’ answered Jem, and a spasm seemed to stifle his voice. ‘Ill! He’s dying!’

CHAPTER XII.

RUN TO EARTH.

‘DYING!’ Mr. Clive was a man of no nervous and feeble constitution, no morbid sensibility; but the brief response made by Jem, confirmed as it was in its alarming import by Jem’s facial expression, sent a thrill and a chill to his heart which for a moment seemed to paralyse him, for he felt unable to advance or retire. Dying! The gifted painter of the lovely tree. Dying! The brave rescuer of the aged lady! It is too sad. It cannot be true.

Jem opened the door to allow Mr. Clive to enter the sick-chamber, if he so desired. He asked no questions as to his right to the privilege; he could read in his face the language which can be neither assumed nor concealed,—

sympathy deep and true, and that was credential sufficient for the young man. All he did was to enjoin silence by a motion of the hand. Mr. Clive stepped into the room, but the light was so subdued by a curtain stretched across the window that it was some moments before his eyes were reconciled to the gloom. Gradually the scene became revealed, and Mr. Clive's eyes sought the suffering occupant. Lying on a camp-bedstead at the end of the chamber, which was partly concealed by hanging drapery, was a wasted figure of a young man whose face, pinched and pallid, was yet remarkable for its expression of dignity and serenity. A rug was carefully spread over him; a nosegay stood on a little table beside the bed, at the head of which was placed a chair. The rug and the nosegay were Jem's, and he at once took his seat on the chair at the head of the bed, and gave the sleeper the watchful attention which the visitor had for a moment interrupted, and which was resumed as though no visitor were present.

Mr. Clive's glance passed for a moment from the sufferer to the surroundings, and the worldly

condition of the occupant was at once manifest. Almost Spartan in its simplicity, and in the absence of even the faintest pretence to luxury, it was conspicuously clean and orderly. Brushes and pencils, paints and palettes, easels and canvases, books and folios, studies, draperies and casts no longer in use, were arranged with a method which, to Mr. Clive, seemed remarkable, as method and order are not, as he knew, proverbially characteristic of artists. The order and the method were Jem's,—they had come to him as an instinct in a sick-chamber, though hitherto, as Mrs. Starkie was never weary of testifying, he was by nature, and in the bosom of his family, the incarnation of untidiness and misrule.

If Jem wondered (as, possibly, he did) who the stranger was, and what his errand was, no sign of wonderment, no interrogatory glance escaped him. He had eyes and thought, hope and fear for one creature only at that moment,—the beloved friend at whose side he watched, and whom he believed to be entering upon his journey hence. And if the devoted youth was so strangely forgetful of so palpable a duty to

a dying friend, as that of summoning medical aid, it was because that friend had avowed his pious resignation to the inevitable, and had prayed to be allowed to die in peace; and to Jem his wish was law. At one moment the prostrate man had a strong desire to summon Dr. Eustace, if only to let him see that the three years' span which he promised him was all too liberal; for the day and the hour were already upon him. But he had not the courage again to face the man whose kindness he had so ill-requited, by withholding his name and dwelling-place—and, indeed, he reflected, it were better, both for his own sake and for the sake of the only living creature who cared for him—that loyal and loving friend who smoothed his pillow and bathed his brow with the gentle hand of a woman—for Jem's sake it were better that he should pass away now than later.

To Mr. Clive, the absence of the usual courtesies and the interchange of ordinary civilities between himself and Jem were both natural and fitting. Mr. Clive comprehended perfectly Jem's concentration of heart and mind on one thought—a thought which commanded respect and ad-

miration—and he was content to remain a passive observer of a domestic episode of singular pathos. As his sight became more perfectly accustomed to the subdued light, he noted the varying expression on the face of the sleeper, who was evidently disturbed by a dream. A tremulous movement of the hands, a spasm of the breath, indicated distress, which re-acted on Jem painfully, and he was on the point of arousing the sleeper, with a view to terminate his misery, when Mr. Clive, bending forward, whispered in his ear :

‘Pray excuse me, but I think it might be dangerous to awaken him suddenly. It might be too great a shock.’

Jem’s hand was at once arrested ; he saw that the caution was wise. Turning to Mr. Clive, with appealing eyes, he said,

‘Sir, are you a doctor?’

‘No.’

‘Are you a friend of Mr. Aspen?’

‘I wish to be a friend. I presume you are his brother?’

‘Oh, no, sir ; I’m only his pupil.’

‘Do you live here?’

‘Yes; the landlady is my mother, Mrs. Starkie. I am Jem.’

‘Can I see your mother?’

‘Yes, sir; she is downstairs.’

Mr. Clive turned towards the door, when words from the bed—words disjointed and incoherent—arrested his foot.

‘Again I hear it! that sweet, soft voice; my mother’s, yet not my mother’s! That song and that face! I’ll paint it! Yes, if I live long enough—that song—that face; let me, let me——’ and the dreamer turned in his bed, and relapsed into a deep sleep.

Jem quite comprehended the train of ideas which agitated Aspen, and which was a pure enigma to Mr. Clive, and, without reflection, he said, in a subdued tone, ‘And he *did* paint it,’ at the same moment glancing towards a canvas on the easel, covered over.

‘Really?’ answered Mr. Clive, in the same low key, as he followed the direction of Jem’s gaze. ‘May I see it?’ and he advanced a hand towards the picture.

‘No, no!’ replied Jem, peremptorily; ‘you cannot, sir; nobody but me has ever seen it!’

and he stepped to the easel and made the covering more secure.

Mr. Clive, the art-patron, the liberal supporter of every benevolent work, the man of sterling character and great wealth, saw no affront in the curt prohibition, but, on the contrary, he recognised in it a fine delicacy on the part of the painter and loyalty on that of the pupil. He was puzzled but not pained. It was extraordinary, but at the same time it had the ring of a noble independence about it, and Mr. Clive not only respected the interdiction, but it increased his sorrowing interest in the dying artist.

Descending to the hall he found the little girl who had apparently been in conversation with somebody at the door, for Mr. Clive, glancing in that direction, observed a vanishing skirt—a black skirt which he recognised, for he had seen the identical article at Tapioca Terrace when he paid Mrs. Sparragus his visit. The coincidence at once struck him as remarkable,—Mrs. Liperty here! That sombre lady excited no interest personally, but her movements in the two

instances under Mr. Clive's observation did so to a very considerable degree.

‘Was that lady a friend of your mistress’s?’ he inquired of the little girl.

‘Don’t think so, sir. She wanted to know if Mr. Aspen lives here.’

‘Ah! and you told her that he does?’

‘Yes, sir; and I said he is dying!’

‘And she was much shocked?’

‘Dreadful, sir, for she says, says she, “Poor dear, poor dear! But the Lord’s will be done!” and didn’t she rub her eyes!’

‘And then?’

‘And then the poor lady went away, sir.’

If Mr. Clive discovered any reasonable explanation of the fact of a person making inquiries as to a perfect stranger and manifesting such deep grief on hearing of his deplorable condition of health, he gave no visible or audible expression of the discovery, but inquired of the little girl where Mrs. Starkie was, to which question she replied that Mrs. Starkie was in the kitchen a-making beef-tea, whereupon Mr. Clive requested the damsel to fetch that good woman.

Mrs. Starkie responded to the summons, and at once gave vent to her feelings.

‘Oh, sir, isn’t it dreadful!’

‘You mean Mr. Aspen’s condition?’ responded Mr. Clive, sadly.

‘Yes, poor young man,—such a gentleman, too! I’ve let lodgings now for over twenty years—it’ll be twenty-one years come Michaelmas—and I’ve never had his like in the house,—nor I won’t, for I don’t believe there’s the like of dear Mr. Aspen in all London.’

‘I quite believe he is a worthy fellow.’

‘Worthy; that’s not the word, sir: he’s beautiful! and the beautiful ain’t long for this world, as everybody knows;—and I can’t forgive myself, no, I can’t.’

‘I’m sorry to hear you say that.’

‘How can I, sir? To go and hurt the feelings of the dear young gentleman who only wanted to be good and kind to our Jem, and for me to be that contrairy and throw cold water till he was nearly drove to give me notice to quit and go and live opposite where the bill’s in the window. How can I forgive myself, and him a-dying?’

‘Let us hope, my dear Mrs Starkie, that he may yet rally.’

‘Yes; may the Lord be merciful! and I’m making some beef-tea, which Jem bought a pound of beef out of his money-box, and it’s been stewing all the morning.’

‘Excellent! But I should like with your permission to send him some soup from a house I know of in the city. It will help to strengthen him.’

‘Very well, he shall have every drop of it; you may depend, sir.’

‘Of that I am quite sure, Mrs. Starkie.’

‘Yes, sir, you may depend.’

‘But there is one matter, Mrs. Starkie, in which you have been wrong.’

‘Me wrong!’

‘Yes, in not calling in a doctor to see Mr. Aspen.’

‘There, you see, that comes of your not knowing, but when I tell you Mr. Aspen forbid it when I wanted to, and said he wouldn’t see no doctor and told Jem, and Jem’s that fond of him it’s downright foolish, and I say so to his face as I say it behind his back—he’s foolish,

and nothing would induce Jem to fetch a doctor—and it's hard to be told it's my fault, sir;' and Mrs. Starkie sighed and gave every evidence of lacerated feelings.

'I quite understand, my dear madam, that, from motives of true kindness and in obedience to Mr. Aspen's wish, you and your son have neglected an obvious duty—but, better late than never, you know ; therefore, I will bring a friend of mine who understands these cases and who will tell us the exact state of things. I've no doubt you've done quite right so far as nursing goes.'

'As for that, I only make his beef-tea and do his bit of washing,' interrupted Mrs. Starkie, meekly, 'our Jem does everything else. Lor', sir, he seems as if he was born to it! He watches day and night, feeds him, physics him, dresses and undresses him, reads to him, prays for him, and never takes his own clothes off; it's downright beautiful, sir! and though I'm his mother, and didn't ought, I say it's beautiful to see Jem a-nursing that young man!' and Mrs. Starkie fairly gasped for want of breath.

‘Your son deserves all the praise you give him.’

‘That I never do, sir, I’m afraid! I daren’t encourage him, for, if I did, he’d make ten times more messes than he does with them nasty paints, which he hasn’t a pocket-handkerchief fit to be seen, let alone the table-cloths! No, sir, I daren’t praise our Jem, much as I love the lad!’

‘But I understood from him that he was Mr. Aspen’s pupil!’ answered Mr. Clive, interrogatively.

‘Ah, sir, I begin to think that’s all a part of the young gentleman’s disease. It must be his complaint, for he took to our Jem so violent all because he tried to copy a picter of his.’

‘A picture of a tree?’ enquired Mr. Clive, eagerly, for he was more and more interested in Mrs Starkie’s disclosures.

‘No, not that tree—and it *was* a pretty tree! I never could keep my eyes off that when I was trying to tidy his room,—and, do you know, he got ten pounds for it!’

‘Ten pounds?’ replied Mr. Clive, shocked.

‘Yes; but it was a portrait of a voice, as Mr. Aspen called it—and you may well look astonished, sir, but, as I said, that’s his complaint,—and our Jem he tried to copy that picter of a voice; it was a face of a girl which I should call fantastic—but that’s neither here nor there—and he caught our Jem at it, and he nearly killed him; and serve him right, I say, for what business had he to go messing with them ’orrible paints in a lodger’s room, and let hisself in, with my key unbeknown? which is bad enough in his own room, and all the walls daubed over with sunsets and such rubbish! Well, sir, he changed all of a sudden, which proves to me that it’s his disease, and now they’re always together, and away they must go a-painting in the country, and that’s where he caught his cold,—I mean Mr. Aspen, of course, but, for my part, though he says he’s dying, and Jem says he’s dying, I don’t think he’s half so bad as he was after his exertion a-saving an old lady somewhere in the city, so they say; and, between you and me, I don’t think he has ever been quite right since. Ah, he *was* bad then!’

Mr. Clive perceiving no limit to the good

landlady's rhetoric, and feeling the necessity of ordering the soup and summoning the physician without loss of time, looked at his watch, and, pleading engagements, hurried away, intimating that in the course of the day he should return with a friend, and he hoped Jem would not deny them admission to the sick-chamber.

During the afternoon Dr. Eustace arrived, according to appointment, at Regent's Park, where he found Mr. Clive anxiously awaiting him.

'My dear Eustace,' he said, grasping his hand, 'I'm going to put your skill to the test. I have found a young man who, the people about him say, is dying. If human power can prolong his days, you will do it. And, as the man is too poor to requite your service, I know you will be all the more anxious to snatch him from the grave.'

Dr. Eustace became very thoughtful, and requested all possible information as to the case.

'By a train of circumstances, which I need not trouble you with, I found myself this morning in the chamber of a young artist who lay unconscious on his bed. I am keenly interested

in him, as you, Eustace, will be, not only in consequence of his poverty, but also on account of his patient submission to what he conceives to be his impending decease, and his artistic ability, which is remarkable.'

'What is his ailment?' inquired Dr. Eustace, 'consumption?'

'Yes; so far as I can judge from his wasted appearance.'

'The most hopeless of all,' sorrowfully replied the physician; 'you must not expect much of science in those cases, my dear Clive.'

Then, appearing suddenly to recall a parallel case, he desired to know the patient's name.

'Aspen,' replied Mr. Clive, as they stepped into the brougham, and, ordering the coachman to drive to 9, Thistle Grove, Mr. Clive enlivened the journey by describing Jem, and doing full justice to his devotion, and to his honest mother's volubility.

Mrs. Starkie opened the door and at once reported progress:

'You may take your friend into the room to see him, sir; the delicious soup you sent did it! I don't believe anything else would have got

over Jem, for he says, says he, "Mother, that's the wonderfulest soup that ever was. The moment he swallowed it he seemed to pick up, and, though Mr. Aspen said I wasn't to fetch no doctor, he didn't forbid me admitting a friend, and anyone who sends such stuff as that there soup *is* a friend, and no mistake, and he may bring anybody he likes!" So, gents, you may go up.'

The door was opened by Jem in response to Mr. Clive's gentle knock, and the visitors were received with a nod and a smile which constituted at once a grateful recognition and a welcome.

When Dr. Eustace and Mr. Clive entered the room, Aspen was in a sitting posture, propped up by pillows and enveloped in a shawl which partly concealed his features, but, while greeting the strangers with a slight inclination of the head, his action seemed to convey the inquiry, 'Who are you, and what brings you here?'

Mr. Clive correctly interpreted it, and, addressing Graham, said,

'Mr. Aspen, we are neither idle persons nor curious; we only ask to be viewed as friends

and allowed to lighten, so far as our humble efforts go, the cares and labours of your devoted companion, Jem.'

'You are very, very good, sir,' responded Aspen, in subdued accents.

'And this gentleman,' continued Mr. Clive, introducing Dr. Eustace, 'feels a very great interest in your case, so far as I have described the little I gathered from your good landlady, and he hopes you will allow him to prescribe for you. He is a medical man.'

Aspen glanced at Jem, and Jem discerned in that glance a reproach for having summoned a doctor.

'This is the gentleman who sent you the soup,' Jem hastened to explain, in extenuation of his breach of orders, as he indicated Alderman Clive; 'and this other gentleman is his friend.'

Aspen gave a slight inclination of the head to indicate assent if not approval, and Dr. Eustace accordingly took the seat by the bedside. The young man's features were still partly obscured by the shawl, and the physician peered curiously and with evident perplexity, for he seemed

in search of a clue to a strong impression which he had, but could not define.

‘You are very weak, sir, I perceive.’

‘Very ;’ in muffled tones.

‘Weakness is not necessarily disease. It may arise from too great abstemiousness.’

Aspen understood the euphemism—it was a delicate way of ascribing his weakness to his poverty, and he resented it.

‘I beg your pardon, sir. I have as much food as I desire.’

The retort was given clearly and incisively, and Dr. Eustace started. He raised the shawl, and obtained a full view of the patient’s face. His impression was verified. It was Mr. Graham. The physician took the young artist’s hand, and placed a finger on his pulse.

‘No doubt you do, but food is not always assimilated, and in that case it fails to nourish. We must try to improve the digestive organs, which appear to me somewhat impaired. Does your cough trouble you?’

‘Very much,’ replied Aspen, without raising his head; at the same time it was evident, from a certain restlessness and nervous action, that

his mind was disturbed. This did not escape the keen eye of the physician.

‘I dare say you are longing to get back to work,’ he ventured, glancing round the room.

‘No ; I have done with that for ever.’

‘Nonsense, my dear sir. You must allow me, as a bit of a physiologist, to contradict you. You are below par, as they say in the City ; but, as soon as we have got up your physical strength, you will think, and speak, and act as a young, vigorous, and ambitious man should,’ argued Dr. Eustace, consolingly.

‘I have no ambition now—at least, for myself. I should have wished to see my dear companion here’—pointing to Jem, who stood at the foot of the bed—‘gain the position he will some day occupy. But that is not to be.’

‘Why not, my dear sir ?’

‘Look at my face, look at my hands, sir. Do you not see that I have not three years to live ?’ remonstrated the sick artist.

‘I have been observing your face and hands ever since I entered the room, and I am happy to say that I arrive at a different conclusion.’

‘Then your opinion clashes materially with Dr. Eustace’s?’

‘Have you any confidence, then, in Dr. Eustace?’

‘Absolute confidence,’ replied Aspen, with emphasis, a flush overspreading his features as he spoke.

‘Then, pray, sir, why did you not call in Dr. Eustace?’

‘Because—because I once acted snobbishly, and requited his kindness badly.’

‘Indeed; may I ask how?’

‘Though I was a stranger, he treated me as a friend, and inquired my name and address. I misled him as to my name, and I refused altogether to give him my address. That was the action of a snob.’

‘Dr. Eustace puts a more generous construction upon it.’

‘How can you possibly know what construction he puts upon it?’

‘Because I am Dr. Eustace.’

Graham started at the announcement. It was a surprise and a shock he seemed hardly equal to, and looking his visitor full in the face for

the first time, and recognising him, he betrayed genuine distress, which the kind physician hastened to dispel.

‘But why you should gratuitously vex yourself respecting a trifle which was, in fact, as humorous as it was innocent, I can’t conceive. If you wished to preserve an incognito, you were perfectly free to do so.’

‘But how did you find me out?’ inquired the artist.

‘This gentleman, Alderman Clive,—whose mission in the world is to perform acts of kindness,—brought me here,’ replied Dr. Eustace, indicating his companion, whom Graham had not observed, and who advanced to the bed-side, his presence evidently increasing the patient’s perplexity.

‘You naturally wonder, Mr. Aspen, why I intrude upon you, and why, without asking permission, I ventured to bring my friend, Dr. Eustace,’ said Mr. Clive.

‘Yes, sir,’ replied the young man, ‘I am wondering why you should take so much trouble concerning a stranger.’

‘Did you ever lose a small sketch-book?’ inquired Mr. Clive.

‘My sketch-book!’ echoed Graham, in tones of incredulity and astonishment, at the same time pressing his hand to his head. ‘My sketch-book!’

‘I cannot say positively that the one I know of is yours, but, if you will allow me, I will bring it for identification. It was picked up in Cheapside some months ago.’

‘It was there that I must have lost mine,’ responded Aspen, with energy; and Dr. Eustace, observing the young artist’s agitation, interfered, giving his opinion that he was not sufficiently strong to bear a lengthened interview, and therefore it would be better to leave matters at the interesting point arrived at until Alderman Clive gave effect to his promise to produce the sketch-book. Thereupon the visitors rose to take leave.

‘I will give some instructions to your landlady, and your friend and pupil who, however, gives evidence of possessing such excellent judgment and true devotion that suggestions

from me almost amount to presumption. You will remember when you consulted me in Savile Row my last injunction to you was to hope. I can say nothing better now: hope; but to that salutary advice I would add: submit. Let others think and act and provide. Ask no questions; conjure up no scruples. Submit. Believe that a higher Power than the fallible and feeble creatures you see beside you at this moment is providing for your needs, and submit.'

'Dr. Eustace, I will submit.'

'And hope?'

'And hope.'

The kind physician offered his hand, which Graham grasped passionately, and while Mr. Clive was doing the same gracious act, lingering beside the sick man with words of encouragement and consolation, Dr. Eustace, prompted by a natural curiosity to see an example of Aspen's artistic ability of which he had intuitively formed a high estimate, raised the silken scarf which covered a canvas on an easel, without a thought as to any discourtesy in the act, and he was struck with amazement

as a painting, recalling a well-remembered and beloved face, met his gaze. Had he not been from habit and discipline a man who kept his feelings under perfect control, he must have betrayed both pain and pleasure as he muttered to himself the name 'Mildred!'

As the two gentlemen journeyed homeward a gravity oppressed them both, and for some minutes no words were spoken by either. At length Alderman Clive remarked that the young artist interested him greatly, adding,

'There is a fine independence about him, an unworldliness which is rare and charming. His very reluctance on one occasion to divulge his name arose from delicacy of feeling and a fear of recompense for a service rendered.'

'You refer to his reticence with the old lady whom you told me he rescued?'

'Yes.'

'But can you explain his reticence with me?'

'Diffidence merely.'

'That was my opinion at the time; but while I was in his room just now I discovered the real cause.'

'Indeed?'

The physician hesitated for a moment to divulge the conviction which had forced itself upon him, and which he felt needed confirmation to justify his announcing it as a fact; but the idea of discovering a surviving relative was so fascinating to the lonely man, and one in which, he was sure, his friend Clive would cordially sympathise, that his scruples vanished. He replied :

‘It was a natural but unconscious reluctance to give me pain. That frail, needy, half-starved and perhaps dying youth is, I firmly believe, the son of my dead sister Mildred ! But, Clive, not a word, I pray you, to anyone on the subject till I know, beyond a doubt, whether it is so.’

CHAPTER XIII.

DANGER AHEAD.

NOTWITHSTANDING the airy indifference displayed by Mr. Honeydew in his interview with Mrs. Lipperty as regarded the young man who had rendered such timely service to their neighbour, he still entertained the grave misgivings he had originally felt, for he had considered the possible issues of the act with the far-reaching intelligence of a man versed in calculations and averages, and the logical argument seemed to point to results decidedly unsatisfactory; and, as he traced matters back to their inception, he deplored more and more the unfortunate circumstance which led to the appearance of a stranger on the field which he had hitherto viewed as his own.

In his interviews with Mrs. Sparragus which, unlike those daily indulged in by Mrs. Lipperty, were comparatively rare, he cordially adopted her estimate of the young man, and, as evidence of his sincerity, he confessed that he had employed himself day after day in the endeavour to obtain traces of him, for the sole purpose of gratifying her ardent desire to search him out; but, unhappily, he had hitherto failed. The young hero had effaced himself; and, nothing more being practicable, he thought the best advice he could offer her was to endeavour to dismiss him from her thoughts.

When, however, Mrs. Sparragus told him at a later day that Mr. Clive had visited her—a fact which he had observed for himself—and that he had pledged himself to produce the young man, if it were possible, good Mr. Honeydew had to turn his back to the light and have a violent fit of coughing to conceal the colour which overspread his usually sallow face. It was more than annoying, it was disgusting, to have a second stranger start up, and volunteer to find the first, and more particularly so as he

proved to be a city man, like himself, and therefore probably an expert in matters of finance.

As soon as he had recovered his composure he replied,

‘Well, that is singular! I too have persevered in my researches, and it will be a race between me and the worthy alderman as to which of us will bring you the tidings.’

‘Indeed! how so?’

‘Well; I think I have got hold of a clue.’

Mrs. Sparragus was dumb between gratification and incredulity.

‘I have been informed that there is an artist corresponding to his description living somewhere in Brompton.’

‘But—but is it the same?’ demanded Mrs. Sparragus, anxiously.

‘That we must find out.’

‘Oh, if you succeed, you will render me a great service.’

‘My great desire is to be of use to you, Mrs. Sparragus.’

‘I fear I am already too great a tax upon your kindness, Mr. Honeydew.’

‘Nay, nay,’ replied he, with a gesture of the hand which conveyed that the observation made by Mrs. Sparragus gave him intense pain, and that he could not possibly endure a repetition of it; ‘if you really feel that, my dear lady, I can only say that I have laboured in vain in your interests ever since I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance.’

Mrs. Sparragus perceived at once that she had lacerated her friend’s feelings, and she hastened to anoint them with a healing balm.

‘I hope you will forgive my blundering way of saying things; you know I’m only a simple old lady.’

‘Oh, Mrs. Sparragus!’

‘I only desire to say I do not wish to presume upon good nature.’

‘Let me assure you, Mrs. Sparragus, that I only live to be of service to my fellow-creatures.’

‘How noble! You will, therefore, I am sure, approve of my desire to reward that brave young gentleman,’ she said, hesitatingly.

‘It is precisely what I should have suggested if I had felt privileged to give advice.’

‘I am so glad to hear you say so, for I am

sure, if you approve, it is the right thing to do.'

'No real friend could think otherwise,' urged Mr. Honeydew, with a decision which induced Mrs. Sparragus to be still more communicative.

'You know I have neither chick nor child?' resumed the widow, with doleful modulation of voice.

'Alas, yes!' and Mr. Honeydew appeared to hurl bitter reproaches at Destiny for having denied her the joys of maternity; 'a sad, sad truth.'

'And I cannot forget and I ought not to forget that, but for the young man, I should not have lived to see this day!'

'I can only say that he deserves everything you contemplate doing for him,' said Mr. Honeydew, cordially supporting the idea which Mrs. Sparragus was evidently incubating, with a view to learn the full extent of it; 'no one could entertain any other feeling for a moment.'

'Ah, sir, people look at things so differently. Now, there's Mrs. Lipperty; do you know that she's quite violent at the bare hint from me that

I intend to make certain bequests beyond—Tapioca Terrace.’

‘She is evidently afraid you may be imposed upon,’ rejoined Mr. Honeydew, judiciously ; ‘she is, I believe, an excellent person.’

‘I don’t wish to say a word against her, and I daresay I’m not so fond of her as I ought to be.’

‘That is to be regretted ;’ and Mr. Honeydew looked grave and distressed, but he had to gnaw his tongue to produce that expression.

‘And as we’re on the subject,’ resumed Mrs. Sparragus, ‘I may ask your advice on a delicate matter. I wish, as a proof that I have no ill-will against Mrs. Lipperty, to leave her a memento,—some little thing in token of good feeling, you know. I’m under no obligation to her whatever—she has never done anything but remind me of my sins and shortcomings,—though I daresay I ought to be grateful for that ; but I desire to prove to her that she is not altogether forgotten. Now will you give me the benefit of your clever brains and suggest what that memento should be?’

Mr. Honeydew was hardly prepared for such wholesale confidences. Mrs. Sparragus had never consulted him in this delicate matter before, nor had she enlightened him as to her intentions, though she had entrusted to him, as the custodian of her securities, her testamentary papers in a sealed envelope, which envelope he had felt it incumbent on him, in her interest, to open with a view to satisfy himself that the instrument was in proper form and valid.

‘Well, really, I’m hardly qualified to——’

‘Oh, yes, you are! Pray tell me what to do.’

‘But I hardly like to say what I myself should do under the circumstances.’

‘I beg you will. That’s exactly what I wish.’

The opportunity for a superb act of retaliation which was thus offered Honeydew could not be resisted; he replied,

‘If I were in your place, I should leave Mrs. Lipperty, in token of my affection, my—my—’

‘Speak freely, please.’

‘My cuckoo-clock and my plated soup-ladle.’

Mrs. Sparragus was struck with the felicity of the suggestion. What could possibly be

more graceful as a tribute of respect? The cuckoo-clock had been her maternal grandmother's, and the fact of its being worn-out and the cuckoo no longer vocal only enhanced its value. The crust of several generations lay thick upon its wheels, which was a title to veneration, and its face, marred and scarred with age, rendered the gift more complimentary and significant. And, singular coincidence! these were the very mementos she had originally destined for Mr. Honeydew in the will prepared by Mrs. Lipperty, and there could be no doubt that the alteration in her wishes as regards these precious relics would be highly appreciated by that lady.

‘I consider the suggestion capital, and I decide to act upon it, and will see Tangle and Wrench about it. And now I must ask your advice upon one other little matter,—though I really feel quite ashamed!’

‘I shall be grieved if you hesitate to make use of me.’

‘Those dividends of mine, you know. I quite dread going to the Bank of England since that——’

‘That unfortunate circumstance?’

‘Yes.’

‘It is natural, and nothing but a sense of delicacy has prevented my offering to go and receive them for you.’

‘But could it possibly be done?’ inquired Mrs. Sparragus, energetically, like one who grasps at a hope which may prove fallacious. ‘It can’t, can it?’

‘Yes, under a power-of-attorney;’ and Mr. Honeydew explained the use of that valuable instrument by which he could not only receive her dividends and hand her the cash, but he would also be able, in the event of her requiring funds, to sell out whatever she wished without her being troubled to cross the threshold of her house.

The suggestion, like everything which emanated from him, was pronounced admirable, and that question was consequently set at rest by Mrs. Sparragus requesting her friend to give effect to his kind offer.

‘It is such a comfort to me to get these things settled, for I never could give my mind to money matters.’

‘That is not an unusual failing with ladies.’

‘And when I think how naturally it all comes to you, and how easily you managed all my little investments, and how nicely you arranged the Flinders’ business, I consider you the most wonderful person I know.’

‘Oh, these things are mere A B C to us men of business,’ explained Mr. Honeydew, with becoming diffidence; then, as though asking the idlest of idle questions, he continued: ‘I have no doubt if your friend, Mr. Clive, is a man of business he would tell you the same.’

‘Yes, perhaps, for he is, as you say, a man of business—an alderman, you know.’

‘Indeed! is he Alderman Clive?’

‘The same; a magistrate at the Mansion House.’

The information surprised Mr. Honeydew considerably.

‘How very interesting!’

‘Isn’t it? and to think he should condescend to visit an every-day person like me.’

‘Most flattering! The only wonder is, what his object was in visiting you?’

‘Oh, it was dear Lena’s doing. She told him all about Flinders.’

‘Flinders!’ echoed Mr. Honeydew, with a start.

‘Yes, she told him what a healthy place it is for invalids; and she also related about my narrow escape and interested him about the young man that everyone is trying to discover; that was all.’

‘I understand. And as he is such a kind, good gentleman, I think, if I had been you, I should have confided in him so as to secure his friendship.’

‘Oh, I did. I told him how beautifully and profitably you managed my affairs for me and got me ten per cent. for some of my money.’

Mr. Honeydew had another violent fit of coughing, which prevented his making any distinct rejoinder, though Mrs. Sparragus thought she heard a sound like an imprecation, which filled her with amazement. Mr. Honeydew, observing her gesture, hastened to relieve her mind:

‘This cough of mine tears me to pieces! I

really lose my self-command when the fit seizes me.'

'Yes, it must be very trying, I've no doubt,' replied Mrs. Sparragus, quite reassured.

Whereupon Mr. Honeydew rose, and, cordially grasping the widow's hand, withdrew to No. 3.

As soon as Mrs. Lipperty, from her observatory, saw that the rather protracted conference between her neighbours was concluded, and that the field was again clear, she slid on her black kid gloves and called to pay her visit at No. 2. Shown into the drawing-room, where she was intentionally left for several minutes by Susan with the object of intimating inferentially that her presence was not the dearest wish of Mrs. Sparragus's heart, the relict of the Rev. Ebenezer had ample time to prepare a homily on the vanity of mundane things in general and the faithlessness of man—or rather of one man in particular, namely, Mr. Honeydew, though she was already disposed to put Mr. Clive and Graham Aspen in the same odious category. When Mrs. Sparragus eventually joined her, she was absorbed

in the perusal of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, a book she invariably carried in her pocket, and produced when anything approaching levity or undue exuberance of spirits was manifested in her presence.

When Mrs. Sparragus greeted her, she replied,

‘I was just reflecting, my dear, that we are all more or less Jobs and Jeremiahs. Is it not so?’

‘We all have our trials,’ replied Mrs. Sparragus, with gravity.

‘I am glad you feel that, Lucinda, for what else is life, after all? You, my poor dear friend, have had more than your share of sorrow!’

Mrs. Sparragus did not seem quite to realise the melancholy fact, so Mrs. Lipperty explained:

‘I’m sure when I buried my Ebenezer I had but one desire, which was to lie beside him. What, then, must be your feelings when not one but two—yes, two beloved ones are gathered into the same resting-place!’

Mrs. Sparragus sighed.

‘But, if anything can assuage sorrow, it is sympathy, eh?’

‘Yes, yes, sympathy is very precious indeed!’

‘And I trust *my* poor sympathy has not been altogether valueless, Lucinda?’

‘How could it be so?’

‘If one thing pleases me more than another it is the belief that others beside myself feel a joy in ministering to you.’

This euphemistic speech was rather wasted on Mrs. Sparragus, who did not for a moment believe that she was a cause of joy to anybody, especially to Mrs. Lipperty; she merely sighed again.

‘I allude to—to No. 3.’

‘Ah, yes—Mr. Honeydew is very good to me.’

‘Latterly, in particular.’

‘Yes; so kind of late, ever since my narrow escape in the city.’

‘That was indeed an unfortunate circumstance!’ and Mrs. Lipperty was never more sincere in her life than in making that rejoinder.

‘But good sometimes comes even of these accidents; and if Mr. Honeydew should succeed in finding that brave young man—he says he

has a clue already—things may turn out better for it.’

Mrs. Lipperty smiled approval, while her thoughts ran thus :

‘Idiot that he is to encourage her whim ! But it won’t do to allow him to be more zealous than myself ; I must trump his last card.’

‘That is exactly what I was hoping, for you know, my dear Lucinda, that our trials here below are blessings in disguise ; and, if Mr. Honeydew has been busying himself in furthering your wishes, I have not been less active. And, in fact, my object in coming to-day was to administer some crumbs of comfort.’

Mrs. Sparragus quaked. The comfort to which she was accustomed from the relict of the Reverend Ebenezer usually took the shape of admonitions and exhortations, and at the present moment she felt she could hardly appreciate the delicate service.

‘I came to tell you that I have discovered his name and address.’

‘Whose name ?’ demanded Mrs. Sparragus, with a start ; ‘not the young man’s ?’

‘Yes, dear Lucinda, the name and address and

ever so much more about the brave young man.'

Mrs. Sparragus's first impulse was to fling her arms round her friend's neck by way of expressing the delight to which she failed to give utterance, but, in spite of the benign smile which met her gaze, there appeared in her neighbour's eyes a fierce and deterrent glare, which chilled and dissipated the feeling and left her motionless as well as silent.

Mrs. Lipperty waited for a rejoinder and an urgent entreaty for the information which she had intimated she was in a position to impart, but Mrs. Sparragus remained dazed and dumb.

'Perhaps, Lucinda, you are hardly well enough to hear the news to-day?' ventured Mrs. Lipperty, a good deal perplexed.

'It is so,' replied Mrs. Sparragus, without raising her eyes from the ground, dreading nothing so much as a prolonged discourse of Mrs. Lipperty's on any subject.

'Then I will tell you another day, dear, when I hope to find you more like yourself;' and Mrs. Lipperty, not a little vexed at her failure to trump Mr. Honeydew's last card, retreated

crest-fallen from the field and sought her own home.

The day was unquestionably a remarkable one in Mrs. Sparragus's calendar, for, in the course of the afternoon, a brougham drew up, and Alderman Clive advanced to the door.

Susan was quite prepared to be scandalised, and asked her mistress whether 'that impident man was to be admitted,' to which Mrs. Sparragus sharply replied,

'The gentleman is a friend of Lena, therefore he is to be treated as a friend of mine, Susan. Now you know.'

'Oh, mem, if the gent's a friend of dear Miss Lena's I'm sure he's welcome!' and Susan flew to the door and opened it with a smile which rather confused Mr. Clive, and made him feel disposed to blush, and ushered him into the drawing-room with a bob which was almost too much for his magisterial gravity.

'My missus ain't engaged,' she said, confidentially, with the accompaniment of a little snigger.

Mrs. Sparragus received her visitor with unaffected cordiality. Though comparatively

a stranger, she felt she knew him, for Lena had minutely described his character and related some of his good deeds ; moreover, she had not failed to notice that the object of his former visit was not to serve himself.

‘ When I last had the pleasure of seeing you, madam,’ he said, accepting a seat which Susan placed for him beside her mistress, but which, to Susan’s surprise, he removed to a more convenient distance, ‘ you remember, I daresay, that I made a promise.’

‘ To seek for the young man who saved my life.’

‘ Precisely ; I now have the pleasure to tell you that I have seen him, and I hope soon to be able to bring him here to visit you, or to take you to him.’

Mrs. Sparragus, notwithstanding the gratification she felt, fairly laughed.

‘ Well, if it isn’t like the newspapers which bring out fresh news every half-hour !’ a remark which naturally puzzled Mr. Clive, who requested to be enlightened.

‘ Why, this morning my neighbour at No. 3 came in to tell me he thought he had found

a clue; half-an-hour after my neighbour at No. 1 called to inform me she had ascertained his name and address; and now you've not only found him, but you're going to bring him here! Isn't that just like the newspapers with their new editions?' And Mr. Clive admitted the parallel, whereupon they both laughed merrily, which satisfied Susan, who was at her post at the key-hole, that matters were progressing as they should do, and she began to think that they would not make by any means a bad couple after all.

'With such zealous friends right and left of you,' resumed Mr. Clive, after a few moments' silence (which Susan accounted for by saying to herself, 'he's a-squeeging of her hand now, you may depend'), 'I really feel that you don't need my humble services.'

'Oh, I hope, sir, you do not think I value your kindness less just because others are trying to do the same thing,' pleaded Mrs. Sparragus, anxiously.

'Not at all; I merely thought that, as the gentleman next door manages everything for you so successfully, you might prefer that he

should have the pleasure of carrying out your wishes in this matter.'

'Oh, in business, yes, he's wonderful, but this is quite another thing.'

'Quite; and I daresay he prefers financing.'

'He's never so much at home as when he is up to his eyes in it, sir; and, as if he hadn't enough to think about, he offered this very morning to save me the trouble of going to the Bank to get my bits of dividends, by taking out what he calls a power.'

'I understand.'

'And I needn't tell you I was always on thorns with my bonds and deeds and things in this house in a chest of drawers which might be unlocked with a hair-pin.'

'And he has kindly relieved you of that anxiety, too?'

'Oh, yes; they're all in his fire-proof chest at his office.'

'Just so. Where is his office?'

'In—in—what's its name—Crooked Friars.'

'Crutched Friars.'

'That's it. Crutched Friars—No. 50.'

Mr. Clive, with his inveterate habit, made a

note of the address in his pocket-book, remarking that it might be useful to know the address of such a clever man of business, an observation which gratified Mrs. Sparragus exceedingly.

‘We have been wandering away from the object of my visit, madam,’ resumed Mr. Clive, with genial humour. ‘I came to report about your young hero, whose name is Graham Aspen.’

Mrs. Sparragus repeated the name over and over again with quiet exultation.

‘When will you bring him here, sir?’ she inquired, eagerly.

‘I regret to say he is at present too ill to come.’

‘Ill?’

‘Yes, seriously ill.’

‘Oh, let me go to him!’ said Mrs. Sparragus, appealing to her visitor imploringly.

‘That cannot be at present. The doctor enjoins quiet, and forbids all possible excitement. As soon as he permits it, I will, with your permission, drive you thither.’

This offer was gratefully accepted, and, as Mr. Clive rose to take leave, Mrs. Sparragus

opened her desk, and, slipping a bank-note into an envelope, she said,

‘You have been so very, very good, sir, may I ask one more kindness?’

‘I fear I must refuse the one service which I imagine you wish to solicit,’ replied Mr. Clive, glancing at the envelope.

‘It would make me happy to give him this, just to meet present need, without his knowing who sent it.’

‘My dear lady, such an act would give him pain. I am sure you do not wish to do that.’

‘But he seemed so poor.’

‘He is an artist, and a gentleman; and to remind him of his poverty, or to suggest charity, would be to humiliate him.’

‘Can I then do nothing?’ asked the widow, with genuine distress, as tears filled her eyes.

Mr. Clive reflected for some moments. He sincerely desired to benefit Graham, and also to gratify the generous impulse of Mrs. Sparagus. The brief silence which ensued was explained by Susan with entire satisfaction to herself:

‘I s’pose he’s a-whispering something pretty ; and how kindly my missus takes to it !’

Mrs. Sparragus awaited her visitor’s reply. She felt confident that he would devise a solution of the difficulty ; and she was not disappointed.

‘An artist lives by his art,’ said Mr. Clive, in response to her question, ‘and, consequently, commissions are neither unwelcome nor out of place.’

‘But what could I commission him to do ?’ inquired Mrs. Sparragus, in astonishment.

‘Why not let him paint your portrait ?’

‘*My* portrait !’ echoed the widow. ‘*My* portrait ! Why, I haven’t a friend in the world whom I would burden with it, and,’ she added, sadly, ‘I haven’t a friend who would care to give it house-room.’

‘I can’t believe that for a moment, dear madam. However, perhaps you have a friend whose portrait *you* would like to possess. Let him paint that friend.’

Mrs. Sparragus mentally ran down her list of acquaintances—it did not take long to do so—and she found only one whom, on the ground of

mutual attachment, she could pronounce a friend.

‘There is only one whose face I would care to have always before me, sir, and that one is Lena.’

The suggestion was gratifying to Mr. Clive, and at first it seemed peculiarly felicitous ; but on consideration it seemed not quite devoid of objections : would it be wise, would it be kind to either Lena or Graham to bring them into the familiar position of painter and sitter ? He remembered that Lena took a more than ordinary interest in the young artist, though she had scarcely seen him and had never exchanged a word with him. He had observed how animated, but at the same time silent, she always was whenever his name was mentioned, and how her colour would come and go as his courage and patience and sufferings were descanted upon. It was quite evident she admired his character and pitied his trials, and these sentiments lay dangerously near a deeper and warmer feeling. Ought that warmer feeling to be conjured up ? Socially there could be no possible objection ; and, if reciprocity could be

relied on, the result would be happiness. But would it be right to submit Lena to the chance of disillusion, disappointment, and anguish?

Aspen, with all his fine qualities, was too much of an anchorite; he was phlegmatic, and apparently unemotional. If Lena sat to him, he would, no doubt, do his task ably, but it might be to him purely a technical study. Her face might be to him an object to be rendered pictorially, and there an end. He might neither look for nor see nor suspect the existence of a heart vital with tenderness and a mind rich in feminine graces, ready for companionship, and, if so, how terrible would be the ordeal to Lena! Then, on the other hand, supposing that Aspen should not be unimpressionable; supposing that the grateful current of sympathy pass from one to the other, and the artist awaken to the discovery that Lena's presence is to him more than that of any other living creature, would his diffidence or pride, or whatever the sentiment in which he was encased, dissolve beneath the witchery, and would he study her heart as well as her features?

Weighing anxiously all the eventualities, Mr.

Clive decided that the possible issue was worth the risk, and he replied,

‘I consider, madam, your idea felicitous, and in every way unobjectionable; when Mr. Aspen is sufficiently restored to health, I will acquaint him with your wish to commission a portrait which I have very little doubt he will gladly undertake.’

‘Stay,’ interposed Mrs. Sparragus, ‘I would rather he were not told that the order comes from me.’

‘Very well, madam, he shall not know. And I think, on the whole, that it is not necessary to tell him.’

And Mr. Clive withdrew, leaving Mrs. Sparragus radiant with generous pleasure, he himself being hardly less contented; nor was the satisfaction visible on their faces lost upon Susan, who reflected it with compound interest on her own as she opened the door for the departing visitor, saying to herself,

‘It’s all settled, and no time lost. Well, he’s a nicer-looking gent than I thought him, and they won’t make at all a bad couple. Lawks!

how easy it seems to make up your mind ! I don't believe I could do it in such an 'urry ! But on further reflection she thought she should like to try.

Mr. Clive's meditations ran in quite another channel.

'Poor confiding old soul ! that man of business of hers will rob her of her last dime. She had a wonderful escape in Cheapside, but what is to be done to save her from another danger of which she little dreams ?'

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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